Valley Voice

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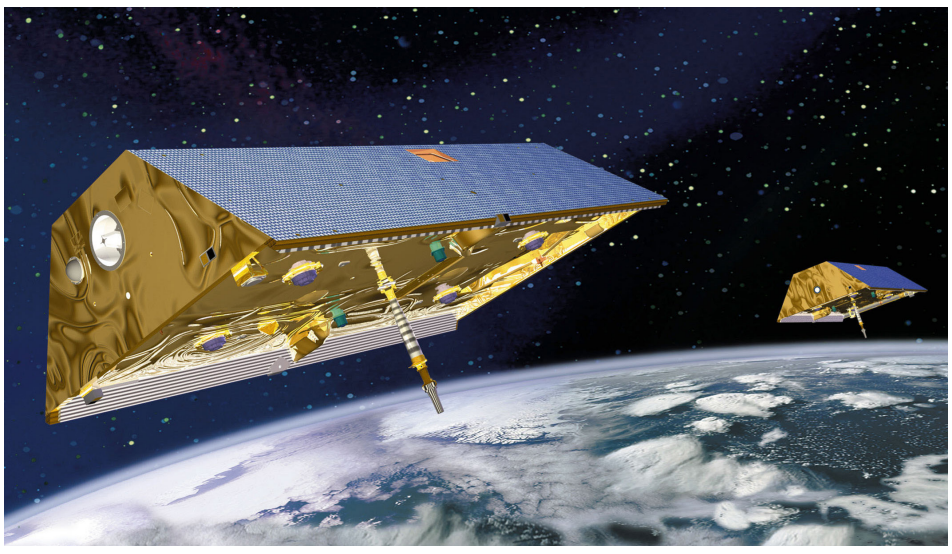

The NASA GRACE satellite

NASA Analysis: 11 Trillion Gallons to Replenish California Drought Losses

Staff Reports

It will take about 11 trillion gallons of water (42 cubic kilometers) -- about 1.5 times the maximum volume of the largest U.S. reservoir -- to recover from California's continuing drought, according to a new analysis of NASA satellite data.

The finding was part of a sobering update on the state's drought made possible by space and airborne measurements and presented by NASA scientists December 16 at the American Geophysical Union meeting in San Francisco. Such data are giving scientists an unprecedented ability to identify key features of droughts, data that can be used to inform water management decisions.

A team of scientists led by Jay Famiglietti of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena used data from NASA's Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE) satellites to develop the first-ever calculation of this kind – the volume of water required to end an episode of drought.

Earlier this year, at the peak of California's current three-year drought, the team found that water storage in the state's Sacramento and San Joaquin river basins was 11 trillion gallons below normal seasonal levels. Data collected since the launch of GRACE in 2002 shows this deficit has increased steadily.

"Spaceborne and airborne measurements of earth's changing shape, surface height and gravity field now allow us to measure and analyze key features of droughts better than ever before, including determining precisely when they begin and end and what their magnitude is at any moment in time," Famiglietti said. "That's an incredible advance and

SATELLITE continued on **6 »**

Local PDs Issue Body Cameras to Officers

Nancy Vigran

Like many police departments across the country, some South Valley police departments are considering personnel body or lapel cameras for their officers. The Lemoore Police Department has been using body cameras for close to 10 years.

It started with two for traffic police, but quickly grew to four when the department discovered how useful the cameras were. The department now has enough to equip its on-duty staff, according to Lemoore Police Chief Darrell Smith. When an officer comes in from his shift, he has to download his entire recording, and the camera is put to use by another officer as soon as it is charged.

Smith and his staff are now seeking a further upgrade for the department and are planning on to ask for approval from the Lemoore City Council in early January. The proposed $35,000 upgrade would include 25 cameras, charging stations for each, and a three-year storage service of film with Evidence.com, which uploads and catalogs the film for numerous departments throughout the country.

Each officer would have his own camera as part of his equipment.

The proposed new Taser Axon Body Cameras have the ability to prerecord before they are actually turned on. They are actually working ahead of time and once turned on by an officer already have 30 seconds of data. The cameras are equipped with 130-degree lenses, providing a wide angle of view. They also have low-light capabilities.

"It's second to none," Smith said of this model of camera.

A study was performed by the Rialto Police Department in San Bernardino County, Smith said. Within the city of approximately 100,000 people, every officer on that force was supplied a camera and each patrol shift was assigned to controlled or experimental conditions during that yearlong time.

"The findings suggest more than a 50% reduction in the total number of incidents of use-of-force compared to control-conditions, and nearly ten times more citizens' complaints in the 12-months prior to the experiment," said authors of the study, Rialto Police Chief Tony Farrar and Ariel Barak, Ph.D., a Jerry Lee Fellow in experimental criminology

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Assemblyman Devon J. Mathis Named Vice Chair of Committee on Veterans Affairs

Staff Reports

Assemblyman Devon J. Mathis (R-Visalia), veteran and Purple Heart recipient, announced his appointment as vice chair of the Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs for the 2015-2016 legislative session by Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins.

Devon Mathis

"I am glad that Assembly Speaker Atkins recognized the need for an actual veteran to serve as vice chair of the committee which directly impacts nearly 2 million Californians and their families," said Mathis. "As a veteran who also was wounded in combat, I know the struggles and issues my brothers and sisters in arms and their families face when they return home. I look forward to being a strong voice to ensure the California Legislature is reminded of the obligation it has to those who have protected our liberties."

"As a proud combat veteran himself, Devon truly understands the challenges that face our veterans today and will be a wonderful advocate on their behalf," said Assembly Republican Leader Kristin Olsen, regarding the appointment of the freshman assembly member.

The Committee on Veterans Affairs oversees programs that include the Cal-Vet Loan Program, the California Department of Veterans Affairs, and the

MATHIS continued on **6 »**

The 2014 Year in Review

Catherine Doe

It's that time of year when the community reflects back on the most memorable events of the last 12 months. The *Visalia Times-Delta* did a series on the year's biggest stories and highlighted the drought, the election and COS' accreditation. The *Fresno Bee* listed its top Valley stories as President Obama's visit to talk about the drought, California Chrome's explosion onto a national stage, Derek Carr's graduation from Fresno State and the closure of Chukchansi Gold Resort & Casino. The *Fresno Bee* ultimately left the decision to its readers, but the results were announced after press time.

Because the *Valley Voice* is dominated by more in-depth reporting than daily news, our top ten stories are ongoing, with some that will not wrap up until well into 2015. As far as popularity, the stories that received the most hits on our website and Facebook page combined for 2014 were, in order:

1. County Employees Fight for First Raise Since 2008
2. Mooney's Grove's Feral Cats in Danger of Being Eliminated
3. The Election
4. Tulare County Supervisors Vote to Ban Marijuana
5. Tulare County Sued by Former Animal Control Employees

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Valley Officials, Others Share New Year's Resolutions

Compiled by Steve Pastis

Once again, the *Valley Voice* asked local elected officials, public servants and anyone who would take our calls to share their resolutions for the New Year. And once again, we received a wide range of responses.

"I believe people make the difference," said Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux, the first responder to our request for resolutions. "I plan on being active in making a positive difference in our communities. I ask that you make the difference in your community."

"I think everyone should be reviewing their life and actions on a daily basis," said Chairman of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors Phil Cox. "I set goals for myself daily, which includes a reflection of my monthly and long term goals. Challenge yourself to be the best employee, mother, father, son, daughter or whatever you might be. By resolving every day to look inside of yourself and make those small improvements needed, there will not be a long list at the end of the year that looks like an unclimbable mountain. For many, every day is a new year."

Meanwhile fellow Tulare County Supervisor Steven Worthley simply resolves to, "keep the top of my desk so I can see it."

"In thinking about the new year and what I might want to improve, my resolution is to be more mindful, to be more present and less preoccupied with the next thing I have to do," said Craig Wheaton, Ed.D., Visalia Unified School District superintendent. "In today's world of multitasking, I think we are being overwhelmed with so much that it is easy to not give your undivided attention to the present moment. This cycle can lead to more and

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FROM THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

A Truly Remote Attack

As everyone by now knows, a group calling itself the Guardians of Peace hacked Sony Pictures and tried to prevent the Christmas Day release of the movie "The Interview" because--ironic spoiler alert--at the film's conclusion, apparently, North Korea's Outstanding Leader Kim Jong-un meets with a fiery demise. We should be so lucky, right? Still, I wouldn't have killed him in the movie, not because it's tasteless--because it's not hilarious. My picture would have featured a completely clueless dictator always accidentally escaping each of a series of slapstick--and equally clueless--attempts on his life. You know the kind of thing: Kim Jong-un would, say, suddenly bend down to tie his shoe at the precise second a poisoned dart should have entered his neck. And the unintended consequences of these inept efforts, while always sufficient to alert him to his endangerment, somehow never would. Thus the general standing next to the dictator, felled by that poisoned dart, would be thought by the Outstanding Leader to have been the victim of, for instance, a jealous wife. I'm thinking more "Pink Panther" than "Pineapple Express." It's a personal preference. I don't recall Charlie Chaplin's visually eliminating Adenoid Hynkel--a clear parody of Adolf Hitler--in his 1940 movie, "The Great Dictator." And I'm fairly certain that, while Chaplin's film will remain a classic on its own merits, "The Interview" will become one for reasons I can't yet quite articulate. Like terror-sponsored censorship.

It's always possible that Sony Pictures pulled-off the biggest marketing coup in film history, catapulting an otherwise run-of-the-mill comedy to something of must-see proportions. But I very much doubt that. Those in the know say that the trail--all too obviously, to some experts--leads directly back to the North Koreans.

Of course North Korea has denied any affiliation with the Guardians of Peace and that it hacked Sony or threatened theatre-goers. But does it really matter who leveled such threats? Of course not! As you may have surmised, I had no intention of seeing "The Interview." But I was happier--if fractionally--when I thought the choice was mine alone.

Fortunately, Sony--and a select few independent theatres--reversed course; Christmas saw a limited theatrical release, and by that time Sony was streaming the movie on YouTube. This is rather close to my initial reaction when the story first broke: Air the movie everywhere, on television, for free and simultaneously.

That would take a piece of the Guardians--and what could they possibly do about it, threaten to bomb every home in the entire country?

We cannot allow anyone--whether an actual dictator or a shadowy group of hackers--to make a mockery of our first amendment rights by dictating content to us. Because that was the attempt here. I am not insisting that, as United States citizens, it is our patriotic duty to watch some mediocre film; I am, rather, insisting that said film be accessible. It would be dictating content, equally, to feel compelled--even if in defiance--to see "The Interview." The remedy in this situation is simply having the freedom to choose.

And we long ago chose an open society. The First isn't just the initial amendment--it is primary, a foundation, the most important. Once we allow a precedent to be set in this instance it shouldn't come as any nasty surprise if, in the future, more than content is dictated to us. Taste, opinion and policy spring as fair game to mind.

Still, so much of all this hacking is merely senselessness. About six months ago, for instance, some unknown entity abducted my AOL email account--for no good reason I can think of, as there was nothing to be gained from it--with the sole result that, after creating a new account, I now get fewer emails. I guess it's a win-win, then.

What is truly disconcerting is that we seriously have to defend ourselves against collectives which--if their monikers are any indication--seem to be comprised of very clever 14-year-olds. Sony Pictures was hacked by the grandiosely named Guardians of Peace. I get it--they're certainly important, at least to themselves. But recently Sony's PlayStation Network was also hacked. Any guesses as to who done it? An outfit calling itself the Lizard Squad.

It is difficult to reconcile this idiocy with the actual threat level we're all under. Last week, the citizens of Albuquerque, New Mexico were threatened en masse when hackers--purportedly from ISIS--seized the *Albuquerque Journal*'s website and, declaring a "CyberCaliphate," said, "Christmas will never be merry any longer." The author of the post collected his English enough to continue, "We know all personal data of Albuquerque locals: Where you live, what you eat, your diseases and even your health insurance cards," adding, "You will look around more often, will call up your children more often, think of your security more often, but that won't help you."

This seems underhanded somehow, and cowardly--much as submarine warfare was initially considered. Yet such threats are not attacks: They are words. Content. And as such they will remain merely unsettling until information is actually tampered with, either denied or made inappropriately public. This is the kind of thing one resorts to when one's resources are thin.

Want to see what a truly remote attack looks like? Watch any of the footage from our drones or smart bombs.

— Joseph Oldenbourg

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Political Fix

Catherine Doe

Farmersville Makes Local History

The little guys in Tulare County continue to make history. Last month, it was Exeter and Lindsay who had sworn in a female majority to their city councils. Now in Farmersville, possibly the youngest council member ever to be elected in the county took office December 8. At only 22 years old, Freddy Espinoza was sworn in along with two other new members, completing the Farmersville's 2015 facelift.

According to the *Foothills Sun-Gazette,* "Freddy Espinoza, Jr. pulled off the surprise of this years' local elections when he defeated Leonel Benavides' bid for a fourth straight term, 371 to 370."

It seems that Mr. Benavides was caught in an anti-establishment movement in Farmersville as many residents were hoping for a changing of the guard. As a former mayor, Mr. Benavides was seen as the figurehead of a dysfunctional council that couldn't get out from under the petty politics.

Mr. Espinoza is a Farmersville native who got the local vote out with his Facebook page and his community involvement. He is active in the Farmersville Parent Teachers Association, a member of the Farmersville Kiwanis Club, and is president of the newly formed Farmersville Chamber of Commerce. Espinoza's connection with the PTA stems from his working as a DJ at Farmersville High School events since he graduated in 2011.

In a Liberal State, Being a Democrat Is Not Enough

No one has actually come out and said it, but it's not enough that the assembly, senate, and all statewide offices are held by Democrats. The trend in the California legislature is to favor the liberal Democrats. The California State Assembly comprises of 80 members--52 Democrats to 28 Republicans. It hardly even matters that the Democrats no longer hold a supermajority. It only takes a simple majority to pass a bill and have the Democratic governor to sign it to advance the liberal agenda.

According to the *Fresno Bee*, "The more liberal, largely urban contingent that makes up the bulk of the Assembly's Democratic caucus can do its work almost unhindered by not only Republicans, but also moderate Democrats."

Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins just announced her appointments to her floor team that make up the assembly leadership positions. All the positions, from Majority Floor Leader to Assistant Majority Whip, are from the liberal metropolitan areas of Southern or Northern California. Speaker Atkins did not appoint any one to her team from Central or upper Northern California.

The fact that it is no longer good enough in the state's legislature to be a Democrat puts our Central Valley Democrats in a precarious position. Being elected in a generally conservative area, our Democrats, such as Rep. Jim Costa and Assemblyman Henry Perea are seen as moderates. Will this be one more reason for our area to be ignored?

The Crazy Train

More than 1,300 trains around the world carry passengers at a minimum of 186 miles per hour in a convenient, efficient and environmentally friendly system. Guess how many of those trains travel on the tracks in the most developed country in the world? Zero. The home of the first moon landing and founder of the internet can't seem to get it together to make a fast train.

California is trying to change that embarrassing fact. The initial operating segment of the first high speed rail in the United States will run between Merced and Burbank and should be operating by 2022. The High-Speed Rail will not only be a economic boon for the Central Valley but for all of California. According to the *Fresno Bee,* "Federal Law requires that the trains and all their components be American-made. That means that the company that ultimately wins the contract (to build the train cars) must establish a manufacturing plant in the U.S., as well as an American parts supply chain. California also has its own 'Buy California' legislation on the books requiring the state rail authority to 'make every effort to purchase high-speed train rolling stock and related equipment that are manufactured in California.'"

California may have some competition when it comes to making history. Texas is now threatening to be the first to construct a HSR line between Dallas and Houston. According to Reuters, "The Texas Central Railway Company plans to use private investment and Central Japan Railway bullet train technology to run a line between two of the largest U.S. cities. Company officials say service could begin in 2021. 'If we can't do it in Texas, I don't know where in the United States you could do it,' said Richard Lawless, chairman and chief executive officer of Texas Central Railway, a private company set up about four years ago to build high-speed rail."

If the Central Valley can quit biting the hand that feeds it, California can beat Texas in building the first HSR. At first glance, all the lawsuits against HSR seem to be a hindrance. But according to Dan Richard, chair of the California High-Speed Rail Authority, HSR is having an easy time of it compared to many projects of the past. 2,300 lawsuits were filed to prevent the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge and the California Water Project came within a single vote of not getting through the legislature at all.

Little by little, the lawsuits are dropping away and now the California High-Speed Rail Authority is hosting a ceremonial groundbreaking in Fresno on January 6, 2015. Who will be there and the exact location has not been divulged. The only thing for certain is this groundbreaking will make history throughout the United States and hopefully California won't let the execution capital of the country beat them to it.

Bush Takes the Lead – But Does He?

According to *Bloomberg Politics*, a recent poll came out that puts Jeb Bush comfortably ahead of a large field of Republican contenders for the presidential nomination in 2016. "CNN/ORC poll released Sunday shows the former Florida governor as the clear frontrunner for his party's nomination, with 23% support among Republicans across the country." These numbers suggest that many more Americans seriously consider Mr. Bush a candidate since he made an official announcement that he was actively exploring a run for the presidency.

The article continued, "That's a significant margin over other potential GOP candidates eyeing the field, including New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who received 13% support among Republicans. Conservative speaker Ben Carson came in third with 7%, with former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee and Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky close behind, pulling 6% apiece. All other potential candidates received 5% or less."

Two questions emerge from this poll: How would Mr. Bush do in a contest against Mitt Romney, and who the heck is Ben Carson?

Former presidential candidate Romney has consistently done better in the polls than all other potential Republican candidates. But is it real, or would Mr. Romney's popularity plummet the minute he threw his hat into the race? This seems to be a major concern of Mr. Bush's also, and can only be answered when he makes his candidacy official. The same could be said of the trepidation many Democrats feel surrounding the pending official announcement by Hilary Clinton.

Ben Carson is a doctor who was raised in Detroit, Michigan and practiced medicine at John Hopkins Medical Center. Republicans can cross out the prospect of Dr. Carson ever winning the nomination. Mr. Bush, the "reader," already pushes the envelope on allowable intelligent quotient for a Republican candidate. Dr. Carson is, quite frankly, off the charts. He is a six-time bestselling author and a pediatric neurosurgeon who was the lead doctor in separating conjoined twins at the back of their skull. Someone of his intellect is not going to tow the wing-nut party line against evolution or climate change. Senator Ted Cruz also pushes the envelope, but he tempers his intellect with a good dose of crazy--so he fits fight in.

Mr. Bush is expected to continue actively exploring the possibility of running for president and will announce later this year.

Cuba Libre

The definition of insanity is when you repeat the same action over and over and expect a different result. That has been the United States' strategy over the last 54 years concerning Cuba.

In an editorial written in the *Miami Herald*, the Cuban embargo is described as a fossilized flop. It goes on to say that the embargo is indefensibly hypocritical as the United States does business with communist dictatorships in China and Vietnam. Then there is our stand on Cuba's violations of human rights. Where was our embargo on Egypt's Hosni Mubarak or Saudi Arabia, where a woman is not even allowed to drive or leave the house by herself? Those guys were and are America's best friends.

The purpose of isolating Cuba with an embargo was to force them to convert from communism to a democracy, which is like comparing apples to oranges. Communism is an economic model and democracy is political system. Little Havana in Miami would authentically love to see Cubans have the same freedoms Americans enjoy, but the United States government could not care less. Our government didn't care 55 years ago and it doesn't care now. Dictatorship? Who cares? The United States wants Cuba to open its markets to the United States and all other foreign investors and become capitalist again. That can happen just as easily, sometimes even easier, with a dictatorship.

United States absolutely loved Cuba pre-1959. It was America's party central to indulge in everything they couldn't do back home, such as gambling, prostitution, shelter income. Each country had full-functioning embassies on each other's shore and few market regulations gave American corporations a free hand. Does anyone remember Cuba's elected president? No, because there was none. Cuba was run by Fulgencio Batista, a brutal dictator, and we loved him.

So what is really behind United States irrational obsession with Cuba for the last half century? It's not that we don't like dictatorships, it's that we don't like Cuba's dictators, the Castros. Cuba not only went Communist, but a country smaller than the size of Pennsylvania, kicked America's ass. Fidel Castro not only survived numerous assassination attempts but thwarted several plots by the CIA to overthrow the Cuban government. And despite the complete embargo,the country has experienced some level of success in providing its people with medical care and an education.

Now that we have a president who was born after the Cuban revolution, it's time for the United States to do a little foreign affairs house cleaning. So while the residents of little Havana in Miami protest President Obama's opening relations with Cuba, the residents of the real Havana are pouring out into the streets and celebrating President Obama's new policies. Funny, because they were exactly the people who the embargo was supposed to liberate.

Review

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7. Black History Committee Plans Harlem Renaissance Celebration
8. Political Warfare Comes to the Once-Quiet Community of Dinuba
9. Dinosaurs to Take Over Visalia Convention Center July 12-13
10. Oval Park Fundraiser
11. Lemon Cove Village, Where Smaller is Better

County Employees Fight for First Raise Since 2008

In June, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) asked for a three-year contract with an 8.74% raise. They based their request on the Tulare County Board of Supervisor's giving themselves a 8.98% over two years. After five months of negotiating, county workers got a 3% raise and only a one-year contract. This was the workers' first raise in six years. With negotiations starting again in January, the only big winners seem to be the county lawyers.

For its efforts, SEIU was sued by the county. The county maintains that SEIU did not meet and confer in good faith bargaining during the negotiation process. Currently, the county is awaiting a Public Employees Relation Board (PERB) investigation into this charge. The county expects to hear something back from the PERB within two to three months.

SEIU filed counter charges alleging that Tulare County is attempting to silence the voice of its own employees by interfering with their First Amendment rights of Free Speech. This suit, again, is a win-win for county lawyers.

Bargaining Unit 2 had to hold separate negotiations because it joined SEIU later in the year. Those negotiations concluded in October. It will join all the other bargaining units in negotiations this January. Its members actually received a raise in 2013, so this year's contract did not include another raise--except for the cooks. It was observed that the county cooks were so underpaid that there was a higher than normal turnover, so they received a 3% raise. Unit 2 also gained the right to have the county buy back unused sick time, up to 60 hours, and increased health coverage for their spouses and children. Unit 2 workers also now have legal representation if they feel they have been treated unfairly on the job.

Mooney Grove Cats and the Trap, Neuter and Release Program

Last January, what started as a quaint story about a few crazy cat people feeding and neutering some feral and stray cats in Mooney Grove, turned into a political hot potato. The intrigue was almost as thick as any episode of "Downton Abbey," half of which couldn't be reported on because corroborating sources were too scared to comment or too scared about losing their jobs. Maybe not for some employees, but, at least for the cats, the story has a happy ending. The county is now negotiating with the Visalia Feral Cat Coalition (VFCC) to embrace the trap, neuter and release program (TNR) so fewer cats will be euthanized.

In October, the VFCC conducted a successful sweep of a large group of semi-feral cats in the mobile home park right next to Mooney Grove. According to Dr. Nan Kuswa of Companion Animal Medical Center, these are the same cats that eventually populate Mooney Grove. The sweep resulted in the spaying and neutering of more than 50 feral cats. After the cats recovered they were returned to the mobile home park. Because they can no longer reproduce and will not let any new cats into the area, the colony, and the Mooney Grove cats, will gradually decrease and no longer be a nuisance.

The *Visalia Times-Delta* reported, "That's quite a bargain compared to the $120 it costs to euthanize a cat… 'Another method, practiced at Mooney Grove Park for more than 20 years, involves trapping and removing feral cats to be euthanized,' said Neil Pilegard, Tulare County Parks and Recreation Division manager. In 2013, Tulare County Animal Control received 26 feral cats from Mooney Grove Park. Two were adopted and the remaining 24 were euthanized."

Coincidently, featured in the *Visalia Times-Delta* picture gallery of the sweep was Paula Mendoza, one of the defendants in the Tulare County Animal Control suit. Though negatively portrayed in the suit, Dr. Kuswa said that Mendoza had offered to help a long time ago in the TNR sweeps. She said that Mendoza was a very motivated worker and genuinely wanted to help the animals. "She was really a nice gal."

In yet another unlikely twist, the January 2, 2014 cat article portended both the Tulare County Animal Control suit and the controversy over the Mooney Grove 20-year plan. Ten months after the *Valley Voice* article reported something fishy going on at animal control, two former employees of the department sued the county. The same was true about the tensions that erupted over the Mooney Grove master plan.

The Election

The 2014 election garnered the third most hits on the *Valley Voice* website and Facebook page; of particular were Ralph Kaelble's declaration of how he would make changes at the Tulare County District Attorney's office, and Felipe Martinez' article about being more responsive than Supervisor Ennis to the constituents of Tulare County Supervisor District 5.

Both candidates lost by a large margin, while a complete unknown emerged victorious in the contest over State Assembly District 26.

In the early days of the campaign, Esther Barajas was considered the biggest and only threat to heir apparent Rudy Mendoza for State Assembly District 26. Barajas was the only other candidate to file campaign finance forms with the Secretary of State's office and was establishing herself as a serious contender. But an ambitious young man, Devon Mathis, was Barajas' campaign manager. He took one look around and decided he could do a better job than any of the other five candidates he saw running. Apparently, Mathis was correct; he came in second in the June primary, then won with 53.6% of the vote in the general election. Assemblyman Mathis was sworn in December 1. The day prior to his being sworn into office, his wife gave birth to twins, a girl and a boy.

Assembly Member Connie Conway was so sure that Mendoza would win her seat that she didn't even put her downtown office back on the rental market, planning to just hand the keys over to Mendoza. Because Conway had termed out, and there was no incumbent, the contest turned into a bit of a free-for-all. All those involved in the election and the campaign saw six pretty unevenly matched candidates. The voters, on the other hand, saw five people of color and one white guy. Assemblyman Mathis not only won because of his ground game and qualifications, but also because of low voter turnout. Low voter turnout favors conservatives, and no matter how much society wants to deny it, there are just some conservatives who are not going to vote for a candidate of Mexican heritage. If Visalia can't get a Mexican-American elected to its own city council, it is very unlikely the generally more conservative Tulare County residents would vote a Mexican-American to office for the assembly.

Tulare County Supervisors Vote to Ban Marijuana

The Tulare County Board of Supervisors voted 5-0 on June 3 to ban all medical marijuana cultivation by cooperatives or individuals. Previously, it was legal for cooperatives to grow 99 plants, and for individuals to grow up to 24 plants within an enclosed structure and out of public view. Tulare County is following the lead of the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, which banned all marijuana cultivation in its unincorporated areas starting in February. The ban includes fines of $1,000 per plan--and whose enforcement has caused Fresno County all kinds of grief.

Tulare County Supervisors find themselves in the difficult position of trying to reduce violent crime by banning the cultivation of pot in a state that increasingly wants to make it legal. Whereas many a pampered Marin County resident would love to light up a doobie originating in Tulare County, they wouldn't be so gung-ho if they got Tulare County's crime rate along with it. California legalized medical marijuana in 1996. An initiative to legalize pot for general use will be on the 2016 ballot and is predicted to pass.

Tulare County's ban on the cultivation of pot will not go into effect until after a public hearing by the Planning Commission, which then makes its recommendation to the supervisors, who will then vote on the matter at a public meeting. The public hearing has been delayed until sometime in 2015.

Tulare County Animal Control Suit

Two former Tulare County Animal Control employees, retired USMC Major Paul Grenseman and Julia Jimenez, filed suit in Tulare County Superior Court against five Tulare County employees. The plaintiffs are suing the county for "discrimination, racial/ethnic and sexual harassment, failure to prevent discrimination and failure to prevent harassment as well retaliation for objecting to, speaking out against, and complaining of illegal discrimination and harassment." The county was served on November 18, and had 30 days from the time of being served to respond. Due to the holidays, the county asked for an extension and its response is now due around January 15. Of the five employees being sued, one has not been served because she cannot be found. According to John Sarsfield, lawyer for the plaintiffs, "people who cannot be found can be served by 'publication.' Essentially we would get permission from the court to serve them by running a legal notice in a newspaper of record. They are presumed

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Sequoia Riverlands Trust
Conserving California's Heartland

Doyle Springs Property to be Protected by Sequoia Riverlands Trust

Staff Reports

The Stewardship Council and Sequoia Riverlands Trust (SRT) have announced a first-of-its-kind conservation easement for Pacific Gas and Electric Company-owned lands. Last month, PG&E conveyed a conservation easement on its Doyle Springs property to Visalia-based Sequoia Riverlands Trust.

The Doyle Springs easement is the first conservation easement on lands being retained by PG&E that are to be permanently protected under terms of a settlement agreement being implemented by the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council (Stewardship Council) for PG&E watershed lands totaling more than 140,000 acres.

The Doyle Springs property and the Tule River Project are located within a small valley along the north fork of the middle fork of the Tule River. The property is surrounded by public lands managed by the Sequoia National Forest and is adjacent to land, cabins and recreational facilities owned by the Doyle Springs Association.

"Sequoia Riverlands Trust is pleased to bring its conservation expertise to these important PG&E lands," said SRT Executive Director Soapy Mulholland. "We look forward to a long and positive working relationship with PG&E and the Doyle Springs homeowners. We appreciate the Stewardship Council's role in shepherding this deal to completion."

Early in 2008, the Stewardship Council selected four pilot projects, including Doyle Springs. The four were chosen for the unique set of land use and conservation challenges posed. Doyle Springs has now gained all necessary approvals and the conservation easement has been recorded.

The Stewardship Council and other stakeholders have taken what they learned through this pilot effort and are applying that knowledge to the remaining lands to be protected.

"The Doyle Springs transaction represents years of work by the Stewardship Council board and staff and the parties to the conservation easement, with valuable input from stakeholders," said Art Baggett, president of the Stewardship Council Board of Directors. "This is among the first of many important milestones that the Stewardship Council plans to achieve in carrying out its important mission of protecting and enhancing watershed lands and uses."

"The Doyle Springs conservation easement held by SRT serves as a model of how the Beneficial Public Values of lands with federally licensed hydroelectric projects can be protected." said SRT Conservation Director Hilary Dustin. "The Doyle Springs property may be small at just 43 acres, but it represents an example for the upcoming transactions on much larger properties. We're proud to be chosen to administer what is a truly unique and innovative conservation tool."

Beltran Receives 2014 Anita de la Vega Award

Family HealthCare Network (FHCN) announced that community advocate, Elva Verna Serna Beltran as the recipient of the 2014 Anita de la Vega Community Service Award.

Selected for her impact in the community of Porterville and in surrounding areas, Beltran's long history of community service includes volunteer work with organizations including the Salvation Army, Straight Activities Youth Group, Olive School 4-H, Tulare County Hispanic Coalition, Porterville Women's Day and El Futuro Supervisory Committee, and more than 30 years of service as a member of the Comision Honorifica Mexicana Americana. Currently, Beltran serves as the director of the Porterville Area Coordinating Council, partnering with several local agencies to provide emergency housing, rental and utility assistance, and transportation for community members in need.

Elva Verna Serna Beltran accepts the 2014 Anita de la Vega Community Service Award, presented by Kerry Hydash, Family HealthCare Network president & CEO.

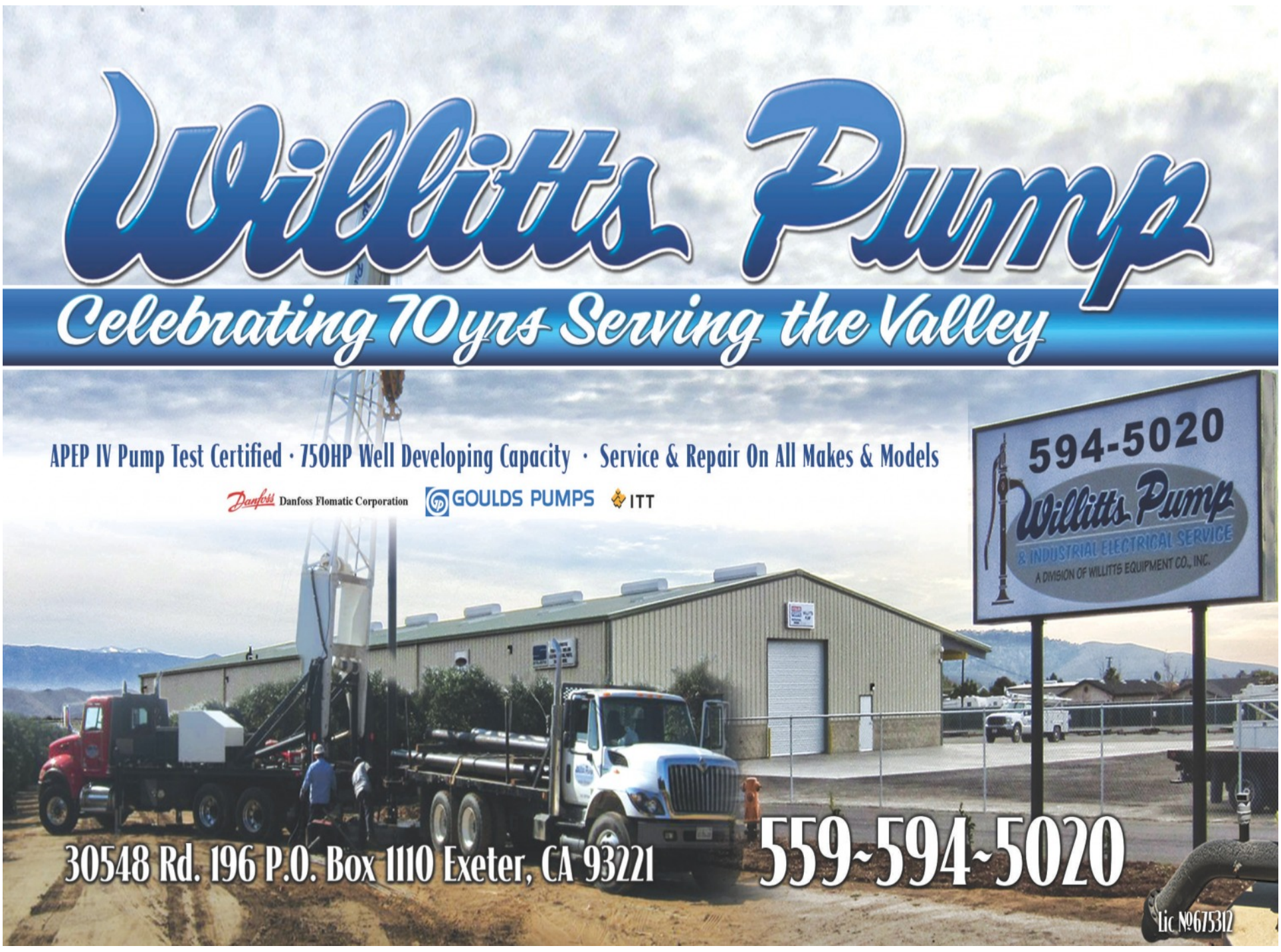
"We are proud to honor Elva as the 2014 recipient of the Anita de la Vega Community Service Award," said Family HealthCare Network President and CEO Kerry Hydash. "Her commitment to this community is demonstrated through her many years of community service and this award is well deserved."

Moving to Porterville at the age of eight, Beltran's community work spans several decades in Tulare County. Her father was a founding member of the United Farm Workers, El Futuro Credit Union and Low Income Credit Organization. Beltran picked up where he left off and has served as an advocate for low-income families and unrepresented groups in local schools, the city, county, state government and in the law enforcement and health sectors. Most recently, she has been an instrumental leader and advocate for local families whose wells have gone dry as a result of the drought; helping them gain access to water they would otherwise go without.

FHCN's Board of Directors established the Anita de la Vega Community Service Award in 2010, in memory of Anita de la Vega, a provider of FHCN who served as a clinician and advocate of FHCN patients for 30 years. The award was established to recognize individuals in the community who have demonstrated a commitment to serving underserved communities in Tulare County. Previous recipients of the award include Carolyn Rose, Graciela Martinez and Isabel Olmos.

Beltran was recognized during a recognition dinner with the Board of Directors and Senior Leadership team of Family HealthCare Network. For more information on the award, contact Nikki Gilman at 737-4746, or visit Family HealthCare Network's website at www.fhcn.org.

Family HealthCare Network is a private nonprofit organization that operates federally qualified health centers in Tulare and Kings Counties.



Mathis

Continued from p. 1

California National Guard. As a veteran and now as vice chair, Assembly Member Mathis vows to review legislation affecting millions of his fellow veterans in California who have been disenfranchised under previous leadership. Within minutes of receiving his committee appointment, Mathis wasted no time in scheduling meetings with the leadership of the California National Guard.

Mathis will be serving under Jacqui Irwin (D-Thousand Oaks), also a freshman assembly member, but not a veteran. Though authentically concerned with veterans affairs, her assignment has more to do with politics than reason. Because the Democrats control the Assembly, House Speaker Atkins makes the committee assignments and appoints all the chairs. As a result, all the appointed chairs are Democrats and all the vice-chairs are Republicans. The only exception is the committee on local government, where Atkins appointed Republican and fellow San Diego representative Brian Maienschein as the chair. There are 44 committees in the Assembly, the largest being the budget committee, which comprises one third of the Assembly.

According to the *Sacramento Bee*, "Committee assignments, and particularly committee chairmanships, matter for a variety of reasons. Committee leaders have substantial sway over which bills get hearings and which bills perish quietly. Most significant bills must pass through the Assembly Appropriations Committee, for instance, and the Budget Committee chair has a key role in shaping the annual budget bill. Campaign contributions often flow to members who sit on committees overseeing powerful industries. And with Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins, D-San Diego, in office only through 2016, committee assignments are sure to prompt speculation about who is in position to next seek the leadership mantle."

In addition to the Veterans Affairs Committee, Mathis has also been appointed to serve on the Committee on Water, Parks and Wildlife, the Committee on Agriculture, and the Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care. Mathis said he is very pleased with these appointments, as they give him the ability to directly impact important issues affecting Tulare, Inyo and Kern counties.

Assembly Member Cheryl Brown (D-San Bernardino) is chair of the Committee on Aging and Long-Term Care, while Assembly Member Marc Levine (D-San Rafael) chairs the Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee.

Mathis will be serving with local Assembly Member Henry Perea (D-Fresno), who was appointed chair of the Committee on Agriculture. When first appointed, speculation arose whether this assignment was a promotion for Perea, or if it was a punishment. According to the *Sacramento Bee*, "There was a time when chairing the Assembly's agriculture committee was a coveted post, but the position no longer has the star power associated with committees such as appropriations, governmental operations — or insurance." Perea was the chair of the Committee on Insurance last session.

Seen as a high-profile chairmanship that could bolster a member's campaign account, Atkins may not have wanted to waste the assignment of insurance chair on an assembly member who is going to be termed out like Perea. Conversely, Mathis and Perea--because they hail from the Valley--can accomplish much, and are a perfect fit for, the Committee on Agriculture.

Mathis' assignment to the Water, Parks and Wildlife committee could end up being a more coveted placement than the agriculture committee. According to the *Fresno Bee*, "Lehman, Quinn and others said the agriculture committee isn't what it used to be. Quinn noted that the water, parks and wildlife committee — not agriculture — has say over water, a critical issue of statewide importance."

To contact the office of Assembly Member Devon Mathis, call (916) 319-2026 or write: Office of Assemblyman Devon J. Mathis, California's 26th Assembly District, State Capitol Room 5126, Sacramento, CA 94249-0026.

The main staff in Mathis' local office starts work January 5 in the Bank of Sierra Building, Suite 505, in Visalia. You can contact them by telephone at 636-3440.

Satellite

Continued from p. 1

something that would be impossible using only ground-based observations."

GRACE data reveals that, since 2011, the Sacramento and San Joaquin river basins decreased in volume by four trillion gallons of water each year (15 cubic kilometers). That's more water than California's 38 million residents use each year for domestic and municipal purposes. About two-thirds of the loss is due to depletion of groundwater beneath California's Central Valley.

In related results, early 2014 data from NASA's Airborne Snow Observatory indicates that snowpack in California's Sierra Nevada range was only half of previous estimates.

The observatory is providing the first-ever high-resolution observations of snow water volume in the Tuolumne River, Merced, Kings and Lakes basins of the Sierra Nevada and Uncompahgre watershed in the Upper Colorado River Basin.

To develop these calculations, the observatory measures how much water is in the snowpack and how much sunlight the snow absorbs, which influences how fast the snow melts. This data enables accurate estimates of how much water will flow out of a basin when the snow melts, which helps guide decisions about reservoir filling and water allocation.

"The 2014 snowpack was one of the three lowest on record and the worst since 1977, when California's population was half what it is now," said Airborne Snow Observatory principal investigator Tom Painter of JPL. "Besides resulting in less snow water, the dramatic reduction in snow extent contributes to warming our climate by allowing the ground to absorb more sunlight. This reduces soil moisture, which makes it harder to get water from the snow into reservoirs once it does start snowing again."

New drought maps show groundwater levels across the U.S. Southwest are in the lowest two to 10% since 1949. The maps, developed at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, combine GRACE data with other satellite observations.

"Integrating GRACE data with other satellite measurements provides a more holistic view of the impact of drought on water availability, including on groundwater resources, which are typically ignored in standard drought indices," said Matt Rodell, chief of the Hydrological Sciences Laboratory at Goddard.

The scientists cautioned that while the recent California storms have been helpful in replenishing water resources, they aren't nearly enough to end the multi-year drought.

"It takes years to get into a drought of this severity, and it will likely take many more big storms, and years, to crawl out of it," said Famiglietti.

NASA monitors earth's vital signs from land, air and space with a fleet of satellites and ambitious airborne and ground-based observation campaigns. The agency develops new ways to observe and study earth's interconnected natural systems with long-term data records and computer analysis tools to better see how our planet is changing. The agency shares this unique knowledge with the global community and works with institutions in the United States and around the world that contribute to understanding and protecting our home planet.

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Cameras

Continued from p. 1

and a teaching associate in the police executive program at Cambridge University.

In Lemoore, an officer is free to choose where to mount his camera, be it on his lapel, pocket, belt or hat.

"This is a tool to collaborate with an officer's testimony," Smith said, explaining that film is not to replace eyewitness accounts.

The district attorney's office can easily access the footage it needs, along with the police department. The cameras are also important for film footage if a complaint is made against an officer, Smith said. It can help negate or prove validity of that complaint.

"My officers should assume that they are being video-recorded all of the time," he said. "Suspects should be aware that they are too."

About five months ago, the Hanford Police Department added the same model body camera Lemoore would like to upgrade to for each of its 35 patrolling officers.

"We were looking at the types of complaints filed against our officers," said Interim Hanford Police Chief Parker Sever. "This is an opportunity to get the officers' point of view."

Prior to getting the cameras, the force was seeing an uptick in officer complaints, Sever said. Since then, the department has not received one complaint. "I think, for the most part, it is going to benefit everyone involved," he said. "But, it's not the end-all answer."

There are still going to be things that a camera may not see, such as things that happen with an officer's intuition, he said. Also, the camera only captures 25-30 frames per second. It could miss a muzzle flash, he added. Likewise, the low-light capabilities of the camera may pick up something that the human eye may not see as clearly. What the camera picks up as a pack of cigarettes could be misconstrued by human vision in that low-light situation, he said.

Some officers were against it at first. However, after a couple of weeks of use, they all seem to appreciate the cameras. "I had one officer come into my office who said while he was opposed to it at first, he feels it is the best piece of equipment ever issued to him," Sever said.

"We're really happy with the cameras," he added. "I believe they will become standard equipment (in law enforcement)."

Currently, the Visalia Police Department does not use body cameras. The majority of the department's vehicles are equipped with a camera, however, said Sergeant Damon Maurice, public information officer. The department is now doing a feasibility study.

"It's just a natural progression to look into body cameras," he said.

The Visalia Police Department is trying to figure out just where it could find funding to equip its 80 to 90 officers, who are on duty citywide during a 24-hour period. The department hopes to approach the Visalia City Council in early 2015, Maurice said.

The Tulare Police Department is also considering a feasibility study in the future, said Sergeant Andy Garcia, public information officer.

"It's just something we haven't explored yet," Garcia said.

Ruiz 4 Kids Fiesta Distributes $378,690 to Central Valley Non-Profits

Staff Reports

The 2014 Ruiz 4 Kids Annual Fiesta fundraiser raised $378,690 – an 8% increase from 2013, and a record for the event.

"Words cannot describe how we feel about the success of the 2014 Ruiz 4 Kids Fiesta Fundraiser," said Kim Ruiz Beck, chairman of Ruiz Foods, Inc. and president of Ruiz 4 Kids. "We are so grateful and want to thank everyone who supported our community organizations."

A representative from each of four organizations was presented with a check at the Annual Ruiz Holiday Luncheon held last month at the Visalia Convention Center.

Wish Upon A Star received $80,338.37, CASA of Tulare County was given $96,475.63, Dinuba High School's Engineering and Construction Linked Learning Academy was awarded $92,425.63 and Miracle League of Visalia received $109,450.63.

Wish Upon A Star believes the granting of a wish is "medicine for the spirit." The wishes this organization grants provide a sense of comfort and support to Central Valley children suffering from high-risk and terminal illnesses.

CASA of Tulare County speaks up for the innocent children who are victims of abuse and neglect by advocating for their safety and wellbeing by training community volunteers to represent their best interests and be their voice in court.

Dinuba High School's new Linked Learning Academy is focused on engineering and construction management. It is an approach that is transforming education for high school students by integrating rigorous academics with career-based learning and real-world workplace experiences. Linked Learning fosters collaboration among industry and college partners, leaving the students both college and career-ready.

Miracle League of Visalia allows disabled children and youth to be a part of baseball in a way not otherwise possible. Participants are paired with volunteer "Buddies" who assist participants on the totally handicapped accessible playing surface in games allowing everyone to get a hit and score a run in each inning. Several communities throughout the country have established their own Miracle Leagues to give mentally and physically disabled children the opportunity to participate in a baseball league.

Ruiz 4 Kids' primary mission is to provide opportunities to inspire hope and change in children's lives. Ruiz 4 Kids was founded in 1990 when Ruiz Foods Team Members approached Fred Ruiz asking him to help them explore ways to assist families with children in need. Since then, Ruiz 4 Kids has organized two annual fundraising events – a golf invitational to raise monies for college scholarships and a fiesta event to raise monies for area nonprofits that are in need to grow their children-focused programs.

Ruiz Foods is a privately owned corporation with corporate offices in Dinuba. Its El Monterey brand is the market leader within the frozen Mexican food category and the No. 1 brand of frozen Mexican food in the U.S.

Resolutions

Continued from p. 1

more stress and to being less productive rather than more productive. So, my resolution is to take a deep breath and give my full attention to the present."

"My New Year's resolution is tied to the big birthday I am having in 2015," said Caroline Koontz, executive director of the Visalia Arts Consortium. "I'm hoping by the time I reach that milestone year, that I will be in the habit of simply doing my best without any regret or guilt."

"My resolution is to focus on the important things," said Gail Zurek, president and CEO of the Visalia Chamber of Commerce. "Life is full of distractions that take your eye off of what really matters. This year, I resolve to keep my focus on those things that really matter."

Meanwhile, Jenny MacMurdo, the new CEO of the Lemoore Chamber of Commerce, said, "I will seek to strike a balance between work and life starting on January 1, 2015."

"I resolve in 2015 to put more criminals in jail – even though it may only be temporary!" said Rocky Pipkin of the Pipkin Detective Agency.

"My New Year's resolution is to help make it possible for kids growing up in the county's poorest rural communities to learn to play classical instruments like the violin," said Juliette de Campos. "In July, I took a job as the executive director of the Tulare County Symphony and I'm now working for some very important people: 60 second graders from Woodville Elementary, many of whom come from the neighboring Woodville farm labor camp. We hope to have violins in their hands by spring. "

Visalia Vice Mayor Warren Gubler resolves, "No new city taxes, more exercising, continue to be responsive to constituents' needs, play more pickleball on the new city courts."

"My resolution would be to find a collaborative solution to our region's water shortages," said Tricia Stever Blattler, executive director of the Tulare County Farm Bureau. "Farm Bureau resolves to be part of bringing together diverse groups and reaching out to stakeholders to bring about collaboration on the #1 issue of our time –

securing a more reliable water supply. Farmers and our urban neighbors can no longer be on different sides of this important debate, but must work together in 2015 to help bring about positive change in how we manage our water supply. We don't have a supply problem as much as we have a management problem, and in 2015 we must seek local solutions guided by wisdom and cooperation."

"My New Year's Resolution is to stay balanced personally with my family and the universe – to not look back to the past or forward to the future but to stay in the present with gratitude for all the events that will be unfolding in 2015," said psychic medium and reiki master teacher Anna Campbell.

"I must remember that as I am retired – I should be planning days when I can ignore the list," said John Robinson, curator at Kings Art Center.

"I always try to make a big deal about my New Year's resolutions, which are actually my goals for the upcoming year," said Billie Johnson, publisher at Oak Tree Press in Hanford. "I find that setting the goals firmly at the start of the year sets the tone for the entire year. And in retrospect, years where I did this exercise were always more successful that those where I didn't. I plan to re-up two of my 2014

RESOLUTIONS continued on **16 »**

The new Tulare County display at the State Capitol was unveiled on December 19.

Tulare County Display Updated in State Capitol Building

Staff Reports

Visitors to the California State Capitol in Sacramento can see the new Tulare County display that was unveiled on December 19.

Each county has a large shadowbox display in the State Capitol to showcase what it has to offer. During their Sacramento trip in May 2013, the Leadership Porterville class was inspired to undertake the project of updating the county's display.

"The class voted unanimously to adopt this as our community service project because it is a very far-reaching project," said Jenna Salazar, project chair. "It will be seen by thousands of people per week, and it will allow us to leave our mark at the state level. We saw this as a very special opportunity."

The previous display's primary focus was agriculture. While this is a significant industry in the county, the 2013 Leadership Porterville class felt that Tulare County has a lot more to offer, and wanted to communicate that to the rest of the state.

"Tulare County is extremely diverse and we felt it was important to tell the whole story to viewers." Salazar added.

The new display showcases the Sequoias and other points of interest, as well as agriculture. While all of the class members live in Porterville, the group was dedicated to representing the county and its various regions as a whole. The project was supported by Eric Coyne, county film commissioner and tourism manager, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors, the Porterville City Council, the Tule River Tribe, the Sequoia Tourism Council, Porterville Noon Rotary and various chambers of commerce throughout the county.

Because of the location of the Tulare County display in the Capitol building, coordinating an installation date required extensive planning, involving California State Police, Capitol staff and union workers.

"Had we known how long the project would take, we likely would have chosen a different project," Salazar joked. "But, now that it's done, we couldn't be more pleased."

Leadership Porterville is a nine-month program, sponsored by the Porterville Chamber of Commerce, that focuses primarily on the various topics affecting Porterville and south Tulare County. Training includes analysis of complex and controversial local issues, introduction to leaders of business, civic and religious organizations, and participation in problem-solving and decision-making activities. Among other tasks, each class is expected to complete a community service project and fundraiser. The Class of 2013 includes: Josie Chapman, Chris Craig, Enoth Kim, Michael Knight, Jaime McGlasson, Maria Mena, Maria Padilla-Leon, Jenna Salazar and Jon Zimmerman.

For more information on this project, contact Jenna Salazar at LeadershipPorterville2013@gmail.com.

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Data Breach Suspected at Visalia Marriott

Staff Reports

Officials of Presidian Hotels & Resorts, an independent hotel management company, announced the suspected breach of the point-of-sale system from the period July 26 to September 2 at food and beverage outlets such as the restaurant at the Visalia Marriott at the Convention Center Hotel in Visalia. Presidian Hotels & Resorts manages this property under an agreement with the hotel owner and is an independent, distinct and separate entity from Marriott International, Inc.

Guests at the hotel who did not use their credit or debit card at these outlets, and guests who charged food and beverage purchases to their room account at these outlets, were not affected.

Upon learning of the suspected data security breach, Presidian officials promptly deactivated the point-of-sale system, began an investigation and then initiated a third-party forensic review. Presidian also reported the incident to law enforcement. The company continues to work with investigators and the credit card companies.

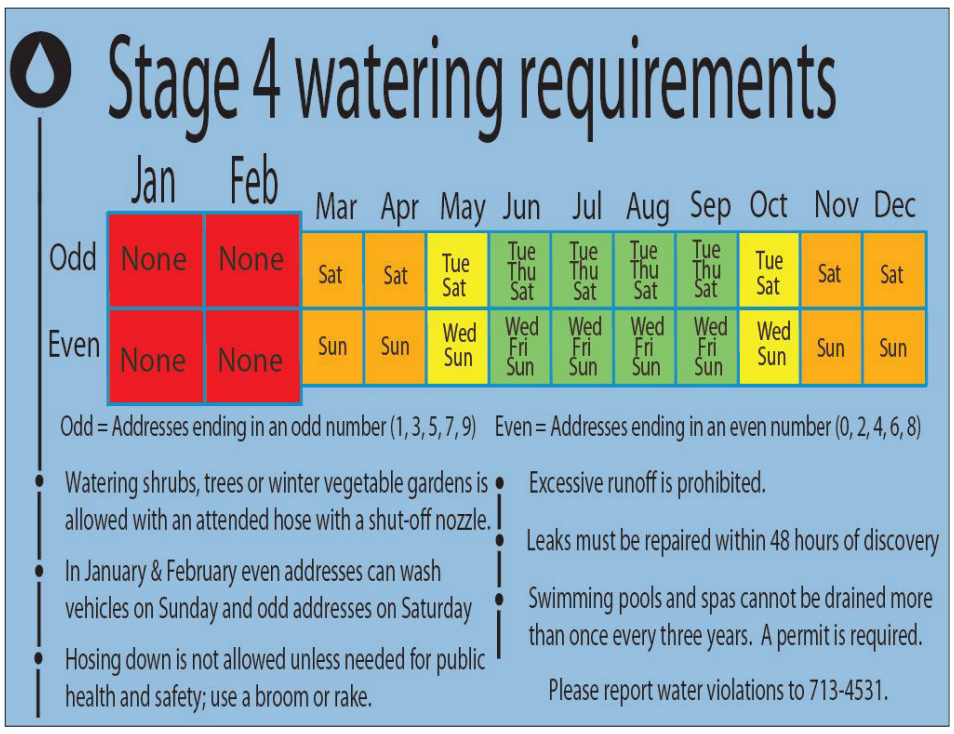
The unlawfully accessed data may have included names printed on customers' credit or debit cards, credit or debit card numbers, the security codes and card expiration dates. The credit or debit card information of guests who paid with cards for food or beverages at the affected outlets during the approximate five week-period might have been compromised and those guests are encouraged to review their account statements beginning from that time period.

Presidian has posted additional information about this incident on its website, presidian.com/credit-card-security-information. In addition, the company is offering one year of complimentary credit monitoring services to all affected cardholders.

While the financial institutions that have issued the credit or debit cards that are suspected of being affected by this incident are already aware of this situation and are increasing their fraud monitoring, or have reissued cards, customers who suspect unauthorized activity should report it to the issuer of the credit or debit card. The policies of the payment card brands such as Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover provide that a cardholder has zero liability for any unauthorized charges if they are reported in a timely manner.

Guests should also consider placing a fraud alert on their credit files. An initial fraud alert, which lasts for 90 days, requires potential creditors to use reasonable policies and procedures to verify an individual's identity before issuing credit in his/her name. To place a fraud alert, calls can be made to any one of the following three national credit reporting agencies: Experian (888) 397-3742; Equifax (800) 525-6285; or TransUnion (800) 680-7289.

A fraud alert request call to any of the three national credit reporting agencies will result in all three agencies implementing the alert. Anyone placing an alert then will receive communications from all three agencies, confirming that the alert is in place and letting them know how to obtain a free copy of their credit report. Interested parties also can order a free copy of his/her credit report by calling (877) 322-8228 or by visiting www.annualcreditreport.com.



Visalia Water Regulations Change in January

Staff Reports

The Visalia's Fall/Winter Stage 4 water regulations for all city residents change today.

Most watering is not allowed during January and February. There is an exception for hand-watering shrubs, trees or vegetables. These can be watered any time with a watering can or with a hose with a positive shut-off nozzle. The hose cannot be left unattended and watering of lawns outside of the watering schedule is prohibited. Washing down sidewalks, driveways, etc., is also not allowed.

A revision of the ordinance allows for washing of vehicles in January and February. Even addresses can wash vehicles on Sunday; odd addresses on Saturday.

The city asks that you report water violations to 713-4531. For more tips on how to conserve water, go to www.gogreenvisalia.com.

Print replica edition at issuu.com/ourvalleyvoice

On Facebook at facebook.com/ourvalleyvoice

Attending the check presentation were (l-r): on air KJUG personality Rose Ortega, Helping Hands President Mariann Sanders, Sherry Meyers and Rachel McDarment, public relations entertainment coordinator for Eagle Mountain Casino.

Helping Hands Receives $7,500 from Eagle Mountain Casino

Staff Reports

On December 15, Eagle Mountain Casino donated $7,500 to Helping Hands of Porterville. Helping Hands President Mariann Sanders and Sherry Meyers were present to receive the donation live and on air at KJUG Studios in Visalia. Public Relations Entertainment Coordinator Rachel McDarment presented the check while KJUG's on air host Rose Ortega interviewed the three women.

"On behalf of Helping Hands and all of our volunteers, we thank Eagle Mountain Casino for their generous donation," said Sanders.

The $7,500 came from funds generated from Eagle Mountain Casinos Annual Benefit Golf Tournament held on August 25, where $40,000 was raised for local charities. Helping Hands was one of the five local charities chosen to receive the funds within Tulare and Kern Counties. The money raised from the tournament is in addition to Eagle Mountain Casino's annual donation budget.

Helping Hands of Porterville has been serving the homeless and hungry for 28 years and serves 50,000 individuals on a monthly basis. Helping Hands needs volunteers, clothing and monetary donations all year long. To contribute, call 788-0812.

Eagle Mountain Casino is a full service casino owned and operated by the Tule River Tribe.

Visalia Police Officers Conduct Second Annual Toy Giveaway

Staff Reports

On December 23, the Visalia Police Officers Association delivered toys to the children at Valley Children's Hospital in Fresno. The toys were collected in the association's second annual toy drive for the hospital.

The annual toy drive is held in memory of six-year-old Garrett Saenz, who was part of the VPOA family. Garrett and his family stayed at Valley Children's hospital for periods of time during his battle with leukemia.

"Our purpose behind the toy drive is to help lift the spirits of the children who are hospitalized while receiving treatment at Valley Children's" said Robert Gilson, president of the Visalia Police Officers Association. "We understand that for parents of children at the hospital, battling the crowds and long lines to go Christmas shopping is the farthest thing from their minds. We want to give the parents the opportunity to not have to worry about gifts and to spend as much time with their children as possible."

The Visalia Police Officers Association thanked its individual members who donated to the toy drive, as well as the Visalia Police Management Association, Redwood Baseball Booster Club and Chief of Police Colleen Mestas for their donations and assistance in this year's successful drive.

Visalia Police Officers Association President Robert Gilson and Brent Miller with some of the toys collected in this year's toy drive.

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Education

Visalia Unified School District May Expand K-8 School System

Steve Pastis

It started as a way to ease the overcrowding at a Visalia middle school, but the idea of offering students the option of attending a kindergarten through 8th grade (K-8) school is gaining popularity among students, parents and teachers.

The Visalia Unified School District Board of Directors voted unanimously at its December 9 meeting to not only continue the K-8 program at Oak Grove and Willow Glen elementary schools for the 2015-16 school year, but to explore the possibility of transitioning a current K-6 school on the east side of the city.

When the idea of adding 7th and 8th grades to two K-6 schools was suggested two years ago, meetings were held to present the K-8 proposal to parents.

"We realized that there are some parents who had an interest in K-8," said VUSD Assistant Superintendent Doug Bartsch. "The parents had a lot of questions. 'Would we be able to prepare kids completely for high school?'

"We knew we wouldn't be able to replicate all the programs of middle school," he added. "Green Acres has a pretty amazing musical theater program, and afterschool sports."

Tammy Milligan, principal of Willow Glen School, at a garden planted by 7th and 8th graders.

Parents were also concerned about their children's opportunities to go out for sports, and if they would be able to play music at school. "Other parents then started saying that they understood it was a work in progress," said Bartsch, "or, 'We love our school and if there was a 7th grade, we'd like to have our child continue.' Some weeks later, we did a preliminary registration."

Registration was opened for two 7th grade classes at Oak Grove and one at Willow Glen. Both schools opened their 7th grade classes at the beginning of the 2013-14 school year.

"Originally, it was to help alleviate the numbers at Green Acres Middle School that were in excess of 1,300," said Tammy Milligan, principal of Willow Glen School, "but when we started in on the program, we found it had much more benefit.

"Kids have an opportunity to delve into a topic of interest to them," she said, adding that the six-week sessions Willow Glen offers its 7th and 8th grade students include such topics as Hawaiian culture, Italy, sign language, theater (which includes presenting a play), newspapers, history of rock'n'roll and art history. "We even have a hip-hop dance class this next semester. And 'Lego Math' will reinforce some math concepts. We had gardening last semester and they built gardens all over campus."

Willow Glen also has a sports program that includes football, volleyball and soccer.

Some parents still prefer the middle school system as a way for their children to prepare for the transition to high school, said Milligan. "That's what some parents think and that's why it's an option."

"This isn't about eliminating a program that has many successes," said Bartsch. "It's about providing an alternative."

"I'm actually very pleased that we're offering different options for parents and kids," said VUSD Superintendent Craig Wheaton. "K-8 offers a different environment than a middle school. I'm happy that parents have the opportunity to weigh the choices."

A survey of 6th graders at Oak Grove and Willow Glen was conducted to see if they wanted to continue at their respective school or go to Green Acres Middle School. About two-thirds of Oak Grove students and half of Willow Glen students wanted to stay at their schools for 7th grade.

"Unless everyone in our community wants a K-8 school, we will continue to offer middle school because there are advantages to that," Wheaton added. "I don't want anyone to be boxed into one or the other."

The main challenge of the K-8 system for educators is logistics, according to John Davis, principal of Oak Grove School. "A K-8 is much more complicated." He said that adding sports and leadership programs was necessary to meet the needs of adolescent students. "The campus is an increasingly busy place.

"I'm sold on it as being a fantastic model for kids," he said. "We watch fantastic things happening to our kids academically and socially. The research really leans toward K-8 being a better model for kids."

He noted that the school staff has known some of their students for almost nine years, allowing the school to build strong relationship with its students and their families. "Our parents' feedback has encouraged us to keep up with the program.

"Our whole staff from kindergarten through 8th grade have been behind this change and that's what made it work," Davis continued. "When there's a soccer game, it's not uncommon for the teachers of the younger grades to bring the children. The K-8 has brought a vibrancy to this campus."

"It's going great," said Cindy Jacobsen, 7th grade teacher at Willow Glen. "This is my 37th year of teaching and this is my favorite thing that I've ever done.

"It offers a choice and choices are always good," said Jacobsen, who was

K-8 continued on **13 »**

Mt. Whitney Health Science Academy students practice CPR in the Kaweah Delta Simulation. Students are mentored by Keith Jones of the Kaweah Delta Health Care District.

Linked Learning Students 'Start Their Future Today'

Bill Davis

The Visalia Unified School District is in the midst of implementing Linked Learning, a new approach to career-themed education. Linked Learning combines rigorous academics with career-themed courses and work-based learning in an academy structure. These academies create a rigorous and relevant educational experience for students, while ensuring that those involved are college and career ready with the skills needed to be successful in today's work force, and also ready and able to apply to a four-year university after graduation.

Last year, Visalia Unified began the implementation of Linked Learning with the development of two pilot academies: the Academy of Health Science at Mt. Whitney High School and the Academy of Ag Engineering at Golden West High School.

Using a process from the National Academy Foundation, school administrators and teachers developed the academies. The new academies opened this fall with nearly 60 students in each one. Students in the academies work on projects and curriculum, which integrate academic subjects with their career-themed courses. Students will also have the opportunity to work closely with industry partners from their prospective industries. This will be accomplished through industry tours, class projects, speakers, job shadowing experiences and, eventually, paid internships.

In Linked Learning, students are exposed to work-based learning in a logical and educationally centered sequence. They begin with career awareness activities, like guest speakers and industry tours. Students then move to career exploration activities such as Job Shadows or short-term internships. The goal of work-based learning is to offer career preparation experiences to all students in a Linked Learning academy. This is in the form of a paid or unpaid internship. For far too long internships were limited to college graduates only.

In Linked Learning, the goal is to provide those students who have shown a proficiency in a particular industry sector with the opportunity to work in that industry and gain real-world experience under the direction of an industry partner. Visalia Unified is working closely with the Visalia Chamber of Commerce, Workforce Investment Board of Tulare County and the Visalia Economic Development Corporation to accomplish this work.

On January 21-22, every VUSD eighth grader will take part in district-wide recruitment events. VUSD will be offering parent presentations as well. On January 21, there will be a parent presentation in English at the El Diamante Theater from 6:30-8pm. On January 22, there will be a parent presentation in Spanish at the El Diamante Theater from 6:30-8pm.

After hearing presentations about each of the new academies, students and parents will have the opportunity to identify the academy they are most interested in applying to. Students can apply online using a link on the VUSD website; paper applications will be available at each VUSD middle school and K-8 school.

Students are encouraged to apply to an academy of their choice, regardless of where they live. Students accepted into an academy will become a student of the school hosting the academy. Transportation will be provided from their home high school to and from the school that hosts the academy of their choice.

The six Linked Learning Academies offered for the 2015-2016 school year are:

Agricultural Bioscience & Technology at Visalia Technical Early College High School

In the Academy of Ag Biosystems Technology, students will have the opportunity to work in and explore a variety of aspects of the agriculture industry, "from farm to fork." Students will learn the basics not only of growing and raising and processing food, but the culinary and nutritional aspects as well. They will also learn the basic mechanical skills needed to work in the food science industry such as electrical, plumbing and welding. In the classroom, academics are always combined with hands-on, project-based learning that takes place on our newly remodeled 35-acre ag farm campus.

Ag Engineering at Golden West High School

In the Academy of Ag Engineering, students learn advanced engineering and

LINKED LEARNING continued on **13 »**

Review

Continued from p. 4

served at that point."

The *Valley Voice* has only reported on one side of this case while waiting for the county to respond.

New Allegations Made Against Sheriff's Department

The Law Offices of Melo and Sarsfield was involved in two of our top ten stories. It was the law firm involved with the complaint against the sheriff's department, and is also the law firm representing the Tulare County Animal Control employees in their suit against the county.

This article was the second most popular of the year on our website and concerned the 2014 election. At issue were employees at the Tulare County Sheriff's Department feeling pressured to buy a lottery ticket for a fundraiser supporting acting Sheriff Boudreaux. The complaint stated that the employees working for the sheriff, "have the right to be allowed to conduct their work in peace without political pressure."

Sheriff Boudreaux issued a statement in response to the complaint, "We are really taking great strides in making sure that people understand that politics on duty is not allowed. Any report we are given is passed along to HR and they take care of investigating it." Boudreaux ended up winning the election by a landslide during the June primary.

According to John Sarsfield, representing the Sheriff's Department employees, the campaign fundraising gun raffle resulted in a complaint made to Visalia Police Department, which was sent to District Attorney Tim Ward, who decided not to pursue it. Separate complaints were sent to the Fair Political Practices Commission and the Attorney General's Office. The FPPC has it pending review, which typically is about a nine months delay in getting to cases. A decision one way or another should come early in the new year.

CEMEX

Though not one of the most widely read, the longest running investigative story of the year revolves around CEMEX' gravel mines. Because CEMEX stopped filling the recharge trenches at Stillwell and the Lemon Cove Facility, the residential wells went dry, or nearly dry. The residential/agricultural wells next to the Lemon Cove Facility were so compromised farmers could not adequately irrigate their groves.

A conference between Paul Mitchell of CEMEX, Ray Carlsen, representing the residents, and Mike Spata, director of the Resource Management Agency, will take place the first week of January. The goal is to negotiate a settlement between CEMEX and the residents who live next to the mines. If CEMEX refuses to adequately compensate the neighbors of the Stillwell and Lemon Cove facilities, the company risks losing its conditional use permit. The company also risks not being approved for any future gravel mine permits, putting into jeopardy the future of McKay Point Reservoir.

In the mean time, RMA has directed CEMEX to fill the recharge trench at its Stillwell mine and has been delivering cases of bottled water to the effected residents.

Abigail Trevino

Abigail Trevino was the subject of one of the most heart-wrenching stories of the year. At the July 21 Visalia City Council Meeting, the council voted to levy a fine of $29,556 on Trevino's residence in southwest Visalia for code and law enforcement violations. Trevino's fine originated from years of police visits and the substandard living condition of her home. Half is for administrative fees as a result of code violations. The other half is for recovery fees for police expenses during a February raid. Trevino's fine and mortgage add up to more than her house is worth, and her salary cannot cover both.

After going through a few months of ups and downs, Trevino toyed with the idea in October of putting her home on the market, but by December was still trying to save it. She is now several months behind on her mortgage and is trying to sell her 1999 Suburban for $2,200. In addition, the Visalia Police Department still hasn't returned her $3,000 that they confiscated during the raid in February. During that raid no charges were filed and the police did not find what they were looking for.

A few weeks ago Trevino received her property tax bill; $15,000 was due by December 10, and the other $15,000 is due by April 15, 2015. If interested in buying Trevino's Suburban, text her at 471-5064.

Your Life is in Your Hands

The *Valley Voice* premiered a few chapters starting in January of a newly published book, *Your Life is in Your Hands*. Author Kay Packard, founder of the American Academy of Hand Analysis, is having her official book launch party Saturday, March 7.

When Packard was 38, she woke up one day and asked herself, "Why am I here? Because this can't be it." After five years of searching, some friends encouraged her to get her hands read and the experience changed her life.

"I was just blown away by what the hand reader told me about myself," she recalled. "I couldn't even articulate it." She eventually quit her high-paying job as a project manager for Boeing and became a fulltime hand reader. "I'm not in it to make a million but it is very fulfilling. There is nothing else I want to do in my life, especially those times when someone learns something new about themselves."

To order an advance copy of Packard's book go to www.YourLifeIsInYourHandsBook.com. The website will be able to take orders starting January 15.

Valley Voice 2014 Awards

Best quote – Concerning CEMEX' claim that the drought has caused their neighbors wells to go dry, Rob Morton of Lemon Cove wondered, "Why are our wells dry and that pit is full of water?"

Best comment – In an apparent game of "telephone" during a heated debate about the story, "Tulare County Sued by Former Animal Control Employees," Mark commented, "Is 'BJ Queen' appropriate for a newspaper article?" To which the editor replied, "'BJ Queen' did not appear in the article."

Nicest comment - "Most journalism is pretty dry and fuzzy on the facts, bogged-down with political correctness, but you have developed a lively, straightforward style that is both accessible to the common man (or woman) while giving the reader credit to draw his/her own conclusions. It's been a long time since I've looked forward to reading a newspaper and you've helped put the *Valley Voice* on top of the stack." --John Dofflemyer

Weirdest comment - Catherine and Joseph, who publish the *Valley Voice*, need to find real jobs because "the *Valley Voice* is just an expensive hobby." --A close relative.

To all of those who see the *Valley Voice* as a place where Tulare and Kings' County residents have a platform to be heard and read news that effects their lives--and those who think the paper is just an expensive hobby--I love you all and wish you a happy, healthy and prosperous 2015!

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Briefly...

Citibank to Close All Three Tulare County Braches

In March, Citibank will close all three of its branches in Tulare County: 501 W. Main St. and 1501 S. Mooney Blvd. in Visalia, and 185 North D St. in Porterville.

"We continually seek ways to optimize our branch network, which include opening, renovating and, where appropriate, closing branches," Andrew Brent, director of Consumer Public Affairs at Citi, explained to the *Valley Voice*. "Accordingly, we have determined that a number of branches either in close proximity to other Citibank branches or outside our target footprint will close in March 2015. In recent years, Citi has opened and renovated more than 100 branches in major cities throughout the country. In the past 18 months alone, we have opened flagship branches in Los Angeles and San Francisco, and other new branches in Chicago, Miami and New York City."

Citibank, which had a 3.04% share of the market in Tulare County, will keep its lone Kings County branch open in Hanford. Citibank has a 4.10% share of the Kings County market.

Legislative, Local Action Credited with Saving 700 Jobs in Visalia

The year-end $1.1 trillion spending bill cleared Congress last month, approving provisions that protect Visalia jobs by making exceptions to the Affordable Care Act on healthcare policies sold by U.S. health insurance companies to expatriates living abroad from their home countries. While the bill still needs the president's signature, without the exemptions, healthcare provider Cigna had announced that it might have to relocate about 700 jobs in Visalia – along with 500 more in Delaware – overseas in order to stay competitive with foreign insurance plans.

With so many jobs at stake, earlier this year Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Visalia) and John Carney (D-Delaware) crossed party lines to introduce House Resolution HR-4414, creating an ACA exemption for expatriate policies. The bill passed the House with bipartisan support.

The effort to save hundreds of jobs in the city was also engaged by the Visalia City Council and staff who took trips to Washington, D.C. to garner support for the exemption, particularly in the Senate. Business and economic stakeholders and city leaders made phone calls and sent emails to senators, urging their support of attaching the legislation to the omnibus package. Senators Feinstein and Boxer, working with their Delaware Senate colleagues, had tried to pass a version of HR 4414. In the end, supporters were successful in attaching the legislation to the omnibus package.

Pentatonix Nominated for Grammy

"We were nominated for the Grammy Award for best arrangement, instrumental or a cappela for 'Daft Punk,'" reads an announcement at ptxofficial.com, the official website for Pentatonix. "Thanks so much for all of your support!"

Bryan Reesman of grammy.com described the quintet as "a cappella sensations" and "major players in the pop world."

Providing the vocal bass for the quintet is Visalian Avi Kaplan.

PG&E Pays $172 million to California Counties in Utility Property Taxes

Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) increased its payment of property taxes sharply this year as the utility continued to make significant investments in its gas and electric system to improve safety and reliability.

PG&E recently paid property taxes of more than $172 million to the 49 counties in which it provides service to 16 million Californians. Kings County received $1.2 million, while Tulare County was paid $455,000. The payments cover the period from July 1 to December 31, 2014.

"Our timely payment of property taxes helps local governments support essential public services for their residents," said Mark Caron, PG&E's vice president of taxes.

Tulare County Fair Board Selects New President

The Tulare County Fair Board of Directors has selected Gary Castro to serve as president for the next year. Castro, owner of KRC Safety in Visalia, was appointed to the board by Gov. Jerry Brown in June.

"I accepted the appointment because the fair needed help," Castro said. "I'm willing now to serve as the board president because I want to see the fair continue to improve and become fiscally sound and debt-free."

Castro noted that the fair has many supporters who worked very hard prior to the 2014 fair in September, but that there is much more work to be done.

"We are fortunate that the fair has a lot of hard-working people willing to support the fair, and they have a lot of great ideas for the future," he added. "It is a vital community resource and my goal is to make our communities proud of our fair again."

Joining Castro on the board are Vice President Dan Hackey, Porterville; Treasurer Trudy James, Tulare; Geneva Shannon, Visalia; Henry Patel, Tulare; Perla Soria, Lindsay; Grace Calderon, Tulare; and Greg Gomez, Farmersville.

"Last year, we were successful in working to make the fair self-sustaining and we increased the level of community participation," said CEO Pamela Fyock. "I look forward to working with President Castro to achieve these goals and continue to make the fair relevant throughout the entire county."

The Tulare County Fair will run September 16-20, 2015. For details, visit tcfair.org.

High-Speed Rail Authority and Bakersfield Reach Settlement

The California High-Speed Rail Authority announced on December 19 that it has reached a settlement agreement with the City of Bakersfield, which will result in the dismissal of California Environmental Quality Act litigation over the Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the Fresno to Bakersfield project section of the high-speed rail program.

This settlement leaves six other cases still pending, including two filed by Kings County organizations: Citizens for California High-Speed Rail Accountability and the Kings County Farm Bureau.

Tulare County Library Announces 'Food for Fines' Results

The semi-annual "Food for Fines" program sponsored by the Tulare County Library donated food items for county residents in need to Foodlink for distribution throughout the county.

During the month of November, anyone who brought in non-perishable food items to any branch of the Tulare County Library had their fines reduced or eliminated. The library forgave $6,394.67 in fines for donors to the program. In addition, many library patrons made food or cash donations without having fines on their library accounts.

Foodlink will restock the pantries of food banks throughout the county with the donations. Items collected from the 15 branches will be distributed in each branch's local community and surrounding areas. Food for Fines is a joint effort held twice a year by the library and Foodlink. The next Food for Fines will be held in April.

Visalia Council Member Amy Shuklian Announces Office Hours

Visalia City Council Member will hold her monthly office hours on Wednesday, January 7, for Visalia residents to discuss issues of concern.

Walk-ins are welcome from 5-5:45pm in the conference room at City Hall, at 707 W. Acequia Ave. Appointments from 5:45-6:30pm can be scheduled in advance by contacting Lauri Aguilar at 713-4322.

Shuklian also can be reached at 713-4400, ext. 8313, or at ashuklian@ci.visalia.ca.us.

Mike Cox Retires from Visalia Chamber of Commerce

Mike Cox, director of membership and sales for the Visalia Chamber of Commerce, will retire on January 2 to spend more time with his family. Cox, who has been with the chamber for almost five years was given a retirement party at the chamber office on December 22, which was attended by about 40 people.

Health Net Gives Local Grant for Quality Medical Care

In addition to giving $200,000 in charitable grants to four Los Angeles County health centers to help expand their services and provide wider access to quality care, Health Net, Inc. is providing a total of $168,000 in charitable grants to 18 primary care physicians in Los Angeles, Kern, Sacramento, Stanislaus and Tulare counties.

"Each physician will be granted between $2,000 and $15,000 to help make a meaningful patient-experience improvement at the physicians' offices," said Patricia Clarey, chief state health programs officer for Health Net. "

Family HealthCare Network Welcomes New Farmersville Provider

Family HealthCare Network (FHCN) introduced Jeffrey W. Rubio, PA-C as the newest addition to its provider team in Farmersville. As a physician assistant, Rubio will offer family medicine services for patients of FHCN's Farmersville Health Center.

Rubio completed his master of physician assistant studies at San Joaquin Valley College and holds a registered nursing degree from Bakersfield College. He has more than seven years of experience serving patients in the Central Valley, including three years as an emergency department nurse. Rubio is certified by both the California and American Academy of Physician Assistants.

For more information, call 1-877-960-3426 or visit www.fhcn.org.

Sierra Bancorp Names New Executive Vice President

Sierra Bancorp, the holding company for Bank of the Sierra, announced that Michael Olague will assume the position of executive vice president, chief banking officer of Sierra Bancorp and Bank of the Sierra, effective today. In his new role, Olague will lead the bank's team of market presidents, oversee branch loan and deposit growth objectives, and work closely with the board and president to assist in merger and acquisition activities.

Prior to this promotion, Olague held the position of senior vice president and area manager for Bank of the Sierra's Bakersfield and Delano markets. He is a graduate of California State University Bakersfield and completed Graduate Banking School at the University of Virginia.

Visalia Orthopaedic Surgeon Earns Board Certification

Ian Duncan, MD, of Orthopaedic Associates Medical Clinic, has earned certification by the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery. In order to achieve certification by the national board, Dr. Duncan had to complete continuing medical education, undergo a stringent peer review process, and pass a written or oral examination.

Duncan is a partner with Orthopaedic Associates, where he specializes in minimally invasive surgery including joint replacements and arthroscopic procedures on the shoulders, elbows, hips and knees. Another area of special expertise is the non-surgical treatment of orthopaedic conditions of the hand, foot and ankle.

In addition to his practice, Duncan served as the affiliate orthopedic surgeon for the Arizona Diamondbacks. He is the assistant team physician for the Visalia Rawhide, the assistant team physician for the College of the Sequoias, and the team physician for Central Valley Christian High School.

Next deadline:
8 January 2015

K-8

Continued from p. 10

asked about the challenges of creating and running a K-8 school.

"Every time you start something new, it's a challenge," she said, "but every challenge we've encountered, we've been able to meet.

"We have happy kids," said Jacobsen. "They are motivated. They work hard. They participate. What I see is that everyone gets to participate, Nobody disappears, because we are small."

And the parents?

"I think they understand we're creating something," Jacobsen said. "I think what they really like is that in addition to a full academic program, we added sports."

When asked if the K-8 system was viable in Visalia, Jacobsen responded, "Absolutely. We know it's viable because there are other K-8 systems all over the place and it's backed by research." She noted the Harvard School Research Study on the K-8 system.

"Our older students are contributing to our school in ways the younger students can't," said Davis. "We provide opportunities for our 7th and 8th grade students to volunteer and help in the kindergarten classroom and with the 1st grade students. They are recognized as models. In many cases, the 1st and 2nd grade students are their siblings."

"She's been there since kindergarten and our school is amazing," said Martha Valencia about why she chose the K-8 system at Willow Glen for her 7th grade daughter. "I wanted her to have a small class setting. For me, I think it's the best for all children."

John Davis, principal of Oak Grove School

Valencia, who also works at Willow Glen, didn't see any extra challenges for students in that system but did acknowledge that there were less friends and activities there than in a middle school. "They still have sports and they have PE every day," she added. "I think she's not missing anything."

"Some parents really want us to open a K-8 on the east side," said Wheaton, adding that the board would discuss a possible new K-8 school at a planning session later this month.

"There isn't a specific site the board has identified yet," said Bartsch. "We know we have the green light to look for a site." He added that the site would most likely be on the east side of town. "Whether it's northeast or southeast, we don't know yet. What we hope is by the first meeting in February to be presenting to the board our recommendation."

The next step would be to have meetings for parents and students.

"We'll only proceed if there are enough students and parents interested," he added. "If there isn't, it won't happen."

Linked Learning

Continued from p. 10

manufacturing practices as they relate to agriculture. Rigorous classroom academics are combined with hands-on, project-based learning that takes place in a fully equipped engineering design and manufacturing lab. Students learn the basics of electricity, design, fabrication, materials sciences and principles of engineering, and are certified in Solidworks design software. Students will engage local industry leaders in work-based learning activities such as field trips, guest speakers and internships.

Architecture & Engineering at Redwood High School

The Redwood Engineering Academy will provide students with a rigorous coursework in engineering and related studies. This four-year program combines high level, integrated academics, on-site laboratory experiences, workplace partnerships, study programs and college opportunities. An emphasis is placed on project-based learning and rigor and relevance. Throughout the courses, students use the same industry-leading technology and software as the world's top companies. Students will work with industry partners in school-based projects that will help ensure students are college and career ready. Even for students who do not plan to pursue engineering after high school, this academy provides opportunities to develop highly transferable skills in collaboration, communication and critical thinking, which are relevant for any coursework or career.

Health Sciences at Mt. Whitney High School

The Academy of Health Sciences offers students interested in a health-related occupation the exciting opportunity to explore their passion beginning in high school. Students complete a rigorous high school program that will help prepare them for both career and educational opportunities in the healthcare field. Students in the academy complete English, science and career-themed courses together as a cohort, and these courses include integrated projects that help students come to a more complete understanding of the topics related to healthcare. Some of the career-themed courses include health careers exploration, anatomy and physiology, global health, biotechnology, health informatics and therapeutics.

Computer Science at Mt. Whitney High School

The Academy of Computer Science will provide the opportunity for students to learn how to create new technologies, not just simply use them. Computer science focuses on software design and development, making sense of code and learning different programming languages. Computer science also develops the computational and critical thinking skills necessary for success for life after high school in any field or occupation. According to code.org, computer science is a top-paying college degree and computer-programming jobs are growing at a rate two times the national average. Keep in mind that software jobs are not just in the tech industry, such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, Facebook, etc. In fact, almost two-thirds of software jobs are outside of the tech industry, such as banking, government, medicine and entertainment.

Media Arts at El Diamante High School

The Media Arts Academy is a pathway for students to experience high school in a new, different and innovative form. The academy will engage students in a wide variety of new media, including film production, web and graphic design, computer programming and visual arts. Along with this specialized content, students will receive additional resources and instruction in the core classes of English and math, specifically tailored to the goals of the academy. This four-year intensive academy will bring together all aspects of technical knowledge and creativity, culminating in a senior year feature-length film project. This project will incorporate screenwriting, producing, financing, marketing and distributing a student-made film of professional quality.

Bill Davis is the Career Technical Education Director for the Visalia Unified School District.

Good Governance

Craig Wheaton

Visalia is very fortunate! We have a dedicated group of school board members who put in a tremendous number of hours making Visalia Unified School District a great place for the students of Visalia. During the two monthly Board of Trustee meetings, board members report on the variety of school and community events that they attended since the last board meeting. This part of the meeting has taken more and more time as most of the board members are actively attending multiple school and district events each week.

Why is this important? Good school board governance begins with knowledgeable board members, and our current board members are out and around the district observing district work first hand. Board members are accessible to students, parents, and employees, which is one of the most important board member commitments: "Each board member is responsible to all residents of the district." (Board Bylaw 9005 (c)).

Also, this board takes the Code of Ethics and Governance Standards very seriously (Board Bylaw 9005). Around this time each year, Governance Standards are reviewed and readopted. This public action is a way to recommit to focus their work together on student learning and achievement. This includes a thorough review of board member roles, ethical standards, and agreements on board member protocols and norms.

Good governance is not an accident, it is intentional. It is not easy, it takes work. The seven individuals who make up the VUSD Board are all independent thinkers. They often express different perspectives and opinions, especially when considering action. However, in the whole, members strive to understand the issues before them and to keep student interests at the center of their decision-making.

Parent and community engagement is sought out by the VUSD Board, and the many years of trust-building is based on a transparency of this public work. Topics and issues are deliberated in open meetings, usually many times, before decisions are reached. The district regularly holds a variety of advisory meetings to bring in new ideas from parents and community members.

Our current board members work very hard. Though they don't always agree with each other, but, on the whole, they are dedicated to working together so that the students in our community have the best educational opportunity possible.

Craig Wheaton, Ed.D., is superintendent of the Visalia Unified School District.

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Viewpoint

Drones and Discrimination: Kick the Habit

Kathy Kelly

On December 10, International Human Rights Day, federal Magistrate Matt Whitworth sentenced me to three months in prison for having crossed the line at a military base that wages drone warfare. The punishment for our attempt to speak on behalf of trapped and desperate people, abroad, will be an opportunity to speak with people trapped by prisons and impoverishment here in the U.S.

Our trial was based on a trespass charge incurred on June 1, 2014. Georgia Walker and I were immediately arrested when we stepped onto Missouri's Whiteman Air Force where pilots fly weaponized drones over Afghanistan and other countries. We carried a loaf of bread and a letter for Brig Gen. Glen D. Van Herck. In court, we testified that we hadn't acted with criminal intent but had, rather, exercised our First Amendment right (and responsibility) to assemble peaceably for redress of grievance.

A group of Afghan friends had entrusted me with a simple message, their grievance, which they couldn't personally deliver: please stop killing us.

I knew that people I've lived with, striving to end wars even as their communities were bombed by drone aircraft, would understand the symbolism of asking to break bread with the base commander. Judge Whitworth said he understood that we oppose war, but he could recommend over 100 better ways to make our point that wouldn't be breaking the law.

The prosecution recommended the maximum six-month sentence. "Ms. Kelly needs to be rehabilitated," said an earnest young military lawyer. The judge paged through a four-page summary of past convictions and agreed that I hadn't yet learned not to break the law.

What I've learned from past experiences in prison is that the criminal justice system uses prison as a weapon against defendants who often have next to no resources to defend themselves. A prosecutor can threaten a defendant with an onerously long prison sentence along with heavy fines if the defendant doesn't agree to plea bargain.

In his article "Why Innocent People Plead Guilty," Jed S. Rakoff draws attention to the institution of plea bargaining which now ensures that less than 3% of federal cases go to trial at all. "Of the 2.2 million U.S. people now in prison," Rakoff writes, "well over 2 million are there as a result of plea bargains dictated by the government's prosecutors, who effectively dictate the sentence as well."

"In 2012, the average sentence for federal narcotics defendants who entered into any kind of plea bargain was five years and four months," Rakoff writes, "while the average sentence for defendants who went to trial was sixteen years."

It's one thing to read about the shameful racism and discrimination of the U.S. criminal justice system. It's quite another to sit next to a woman who is facing ten or more years in prison, isolated from children she has not held in years, and to learn from her about the circumstances that led to her imprisonment.

Many women prisoners, unable to find decent jobs in the regular economy, turn to the underground economy. Distant relatives of mine knew plenty about such an economy several generations ago. They couldn't get work, as Irish immigrants, and so they got into the bootlegging business when alcohol was prohibited. But no one sent them to prison for 10 years if they were caught.

Women prisoners may feel waves of guilt, remorse, defiance and despair. In spite of facing extremely harsh punishment, harsh emotions, and traumatic isolation, most of the women I've met in prison have shown extraordinary strength of character.

When I was in Pekin Prison, we would routinely see young men, shackled and handcuffed, shuffling off of the bus to spend their first day in their medium-high security prison next door. The median sentence there was 27 years. We knew they'd be old men, many of them grandfathers, by the time they walked out again.

The U.S. is the undisputed world leader in incarceration, as it is the world leader in military dominance. Only one in 28 of drone victims are the intended, guilty or innocent, targets. One third of women in prison worldwide, are, at this moment, in U.S. prisons. The crimes that most threaten the safety and livelihood of people in the U.S. of course remain the crimes of the powerful, of the corporations that taint our skies with carbon and acid rainfall, peddle weapons around an already suffering globe, shut down factories and whole economies in pursuit of quick wealth, and send our young people to war.

Chief executive officers of major corporations that produce products inimical to human survival will most likely never be charged much less convicted of any crime. I don't want to see them jailed. I do want to see them rehabilitated.

Each time I've left a U.S. prison, I've felt as though I was leaving the scene of a crime. When I return to the U.S. from sites of our war making, abroad, I feel the same way. Emerging back into the regular world seems tantamount to accepting a contract, pledging to forget the punishments we visit on impoverished people. I'm invited to forget about the people still trapped inside nightmare worlds we have made for them.

On January 23, 2015, when I report to whichever prison the Bureau of Prisons selects, I'll have a short time to reconnect with the reality endured by incarcerated people. It's not the rehabilitation the prosecutor and judge had in mind, but it will help me be a more empathic and mindful abolitionist, intent on ending all wars.

Kathy Kelly (Kathy@vcnv.org) co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence (www.vcnv.org) and is syndicated by PeaceVoice.

Our Christmas Schizophrenia

Winslow Myers

On Christmas Eve 1914, German and British soldiers crept out of their trenches, played soccer together, exchanged gifts of food, and joined in singing carols. Alarmed, commanders on both sides warned of the crime of "fraternizing with the enemy" and the war ground on for an additional four years, not only killing millions but setting the stage for the next world war two decades later.

From the safe perspective of a new century, those soldiers who tried to reach out peacefully to one another seem sane and realistic, while hindsight shows their generals to have suffered from a kind of mental illness based in rigid over-adherence to abstractions like flag, country and total victory.

A hundred years later, it seems we would prefer to sentimentalize the story of Christmas in the trenches rather than using it as a measure of our own mental health. In the way we think about war, most of us suffer equally from group schizophrenia, made infinitely more dangerous by the presence of nuclear weapons combined with antique delusions of victory.

Progressives like to excoriate the obvious war lovers among us, politicians who are lost without enemies to blame or pundits who traffic in crude polarizing stereotypes. But we need to acknowledge the beam in our own eye even as we point out the mote in theirs. Tragically, those who try too hard to make sense of the insanity of war can slip into participation in war. Commentators, even liberal ones, wanting to appear sensible and realistic by displaying their comprehensive knowledge of all the parties in complex fights such as the one grinding on right now in Syria and Iraq, drift away from the essential truth that the civil war there is just as senseless as the trench warfare between the British and the Germans a hundred years ago. Calmly accepting least bad options, we choose from a safe distance whom to bomb and to whom to sell weapons, only fanning the flames of chaos.

Mentally healthy discourse about any war on the planet requires a context based in values both spelled out and lived out by pillars of sanity like Jesus, Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. These leaders knew that killing solves nothing and that the spirit of vengeance initiates a cycle that leads only to further killing.

"Realists" will reply that the idealism of Jesus and friends is all very well but when we are pushed we must shove back. This fundamental assumption, apparently impossible to refute and always referring back to the uber-case of Hitler, becomes more questionable when looking at the insane karma of America's response to 9-11-01. Our leaders unleashed a stream of squid-ink that tried to blur Saddam with al-Qaeda when most of the perpetrators were inconveniently Saudi and none Iraqi. Much of the ensuing chaos in Iraq and Syria, along with our horrific descent into the insanity of torture, flowed out of this initial, still unpunished lie.

The light of history reveals that wars often exhibit a causation that implicates all parties—as we know from examining how the Hitler phenomenon was a direct result of the allied powers failing to exhibit a spirit of magnanimity toward a defeated Germany when World War I ended in 1918. The Marshall Plan demonstrated allied determination not to repeat the same mistake in 1945, and the result was a stability in Europe that endures to this day.

There are practical reasons we set aside holidays to honor Jesus and King, because we know these men taught the only possible way beyond the plague of war—an understanding that we are one human family. Those long ago soldiers in the trenches had the courage to awaken from the insanity of "my country right or wrong" and tried to connect spontaneously with each other on the heart level. If journalists and interpreters could remain with the values context that asserts that all killing is insane, that arms sales that exacerbate such killing are universally shameful, that war is always the failure of all parties to conflict to avoid slipping into the insanity of enemy stereotyping, perhaps a new climate would be created—a positive form of global warming.

Winslow Myers, syndicated by for Peacevoice, is author of Living Beyond War: A Citizen's Guide. *He serves on the Advisory Board of the War Preventive Initiative.*

What I Saw in the Middle East

I recently returned from a trip to the Middle East that included visits to the Iraqi cities of Baghdad and Erbil. There was some good news out of Iraq recently, as Kurdish fighters – helped by U.S. airstrikes – pushed back ISIS forces around the town of Sinjar. This advance broke ISIS's siege of Mount Sinjar, where thousands of civilians had fled after ISIS launched a calculated campaign of mass murder. Despite this progress, ISIS's recent publication of a manual approving the beating and trading of Christian and Jewish sex slaves, alongside harrowing reports of the widespread murder and forced conversion of Christians – including the killing of children – should remind us of the terrible fate that will befall millions if these depraved zealots are not defeated.

Not many Americans would want to live amid this dangerous war. Yet in Iraq, I met U.S. servicemen and women who are risking their lives to assist the battle against ISIS. I am in awe of their selfless courage. These Americans are spending Christmas there – in a warzone far from friends and family – so that we can celebrate Christmas in safety here.

So I'd like to offer my gratitude and appreciation to military veterans as well as active duty, reserve, and national guard servicemembers, especially those now on deployment, and wish my friends and constituents a Merry Christmas.

Sincerely,

Devin

Devin Nunes

Columns & Letters

A New Hope for California

Louis J. Marinelli

The California State Legislature is one of the most professional and well-equipped legislatures in the nation and even though California has the largest population of any state, our legislature is one of the smallest. We have the most stringent anti-corruption transparency laws, and Californians have more control over their government than the residents of any other state. To put it another way, the California government is one of the most organized, transparent and democratic state governments in the nation. So why do we have so many problems? The short answer is a long way away: the federal government.

For years now, polls have shown that Americans have lost confidence in all three branches of the federal government. More than two-thirds of us have no confidence in the Supreme Court, even more have no confidence in the Presidency, and about 90% of us have no confidence in Congress. With numbers of this magnitude, it is clear that disapproval of Washington transcends ideology. This is what the People's Censure is about – a chance for Californians to stand united in a vote of no confidence in the federal government. You may not realize it, but the federal government has tied California's hands behind its back and the effects of this federal handicap are apparent in the quality of our infrastructure, the percent of our tax hikes, the depth of our budget cuts, and the availability of public services. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

The federal government collects income taxes from us, a quarter of which are then appropriated for the development of infrastructure in other states while infrastructure here in California is consistently ranked among the worst in the nation. Some states receive three dollars in federal funding for every dollar they pay in federal income taxes while we receive back a mere fraction of the federal income taxes we pay. California is a "rich" state so there is nothing wrong with charity, but when you take into consideration that California freeways hold five spots on the list of the top ten worst freeways in the nation, what California is forced to do goes far beyond charity. When you consider that nearly 700 of our dams are categorized by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) as highly hazardous, that a tenth of our bridges are structurally deficient, that another sixth of our bridges are functionally obsolete, and that over a third of our major roads are in poor condition – costing each California motorist an extra $700 every year in vehicle repair and operating costs – it is frankly not a time for charity.

There are lingering infrastructure concerns at our state prisons. Let me tell you a quick story. California was ordered by the federal government back in 2011 to reduce its prison population because of infrastructure problems. This is a perfect example of the cycle of federal hypocrisy California must deal with. Congress robs us of a quarter of our tax dollars and uses it for infrastructure in Louisiana, and then the Supreme Court scrutinizes us for failing to provide adequate infrastructure. California has done everything within its power to comply with the Supreme Court's demands – even reducing our prison population by 25,000. Additionally, voters last year approved Prop. 47 – a move that will further reduce the prison population. Regardless, California still needs a two-year extension from the federal government in order to get into compliance with federal demands.

Children across California attend schools in dire need of infrastructural improvements. The ASCE estimates we need $25.4 billion in infrastructure improvements for our schools, of which about three-quarters are more than 25 years old. While the federal government is using California tax dollars to fund infrastructure projects in Mississippi, we have the highest student-to-teacher ratio in the nation, the highest number of students enrolled in public schools, and the highest daily attendance at our public schools. Students perform better at clean, safe schools in good repair. To provide the $25.4 billion in infrastructure improvements our aging schools need, we could settle for another tax hike, we could cut services from another budget item, or we could simply demand that California tax dollars be spent in California. Until we do, students across the state will continue to have difficulty reaching their potential and attending institutions of higher education. The effects of this will cascade on our society for a generation, costing each California taxpayer untold billions of extra taxes for social services and law enforcement expenses linked to lacking opportunities resulting from poor education.

The ACSE further reports that California needs $29.9 billion in infrastructure improvements for wastewater facilities, and an additional $44.5 billion in drinking water infrastructure improvements over the next 20 years. Meanwhile, our water systems infrastructure has worsened in the last decade – falling to a "C" in 2012 from a "C+" in 2006. Right now, we face one of the worst droughts in California's history but the drought is only partly contingent on the naturally fluctuating water supply. If California doesn't have adequate facilities to collect, store, treat and distribute water across the state, all the water in the world won't help us. Californians approved Prop. 1 last November and that was a step in the right direction, providing much of the needed infrastructure funding, but California shouldn't have had to borrow the money for that in the first place.

If we add up these infrastructure needs – $25 billion for schools, $30 billion for wastewater facilities, $45 billion for drinking water – it equals $100 billion, or the approximate amount of taxes the federal government has been taking from California year after year to hand out to other states. This brings a whole new meaning to "I'm fed up with Washington." We have been used and abused. We all love California. This is our home and we are proud of it. That is why it is time for us to unite and express our disapproval with Washington in a vote of no confidence called the People's Censure. This symbolic vote won't remove anyone from office but together with its companion initiative, A New Hope for California, it is an important first step on the path to a new future where California can begin putting Californians first.

Louis J. Marinelli is president of Sovereign California.

Black Tie

Alex Oldenbourg

2014 skulks off into history.

Veteran's Corner

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation

Joe Wright

Disabilities determined by VA to be related to your military service can lead to monthly non-taxable compensation, enrollment in the VA health care system, a 10-point hiring preference for federal employment and other important benefits. The VA can pay additional compensation to a veteran who, as a result of military service, incurred the loss or loss of use of specific organs or extremities. Loss, or loss of use, is described as either an amputation or, having no effective remaining function of an extremity or organ.

Disabilities VA can consider for Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) include loss or loss of use of a hand or foot, immobility of a joint or paralysis, loss of sight of an eye, loss or loss of use of a reproductive organ, deafness of both ears (having absence of air and bone conduction), the inability to communicate by speech, and other disabilities. The VA will pay higher rates for combinations of these disabilities such as loss or loss of use of the feet, legs, hands and arms, in specific monetary increments, based on the particular combination of the disabilities. There are also higher payments for various combinations of severe deafness with bilateral blindness.

Additional SMC is available if a veteran is service-connected for paraplegia, with complete loss of bowel and bladder control. If a veteran is service-connected at the 100% rate and is housebound, bedridden or is so helpless as to need the aid and attendance of another person, then payment of additional SMC can be considered. The amount of SMC will vary depending on the level of disability. Our office is available to answer any questions you may have and assist you with any claims for benefits.

The Kings County Veterans Service Office issues Veteran ID cards to honorably discharged veterans. Contact Joe Wright if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email. There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To find out if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office webpage at www.countyofkings.com.

Joe Wright, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd., Hanford, CA 93230; call 852-2669; or e-mail joe.wright@co.kings.ca.us.

Send us your Letters to the Editor

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Editor: Happy 2015

I'm not going to whitewash it: 2014 has been ghastly--particularly difficult in the unfolding of the family origami--and I'm glad it's over. That said, I'm fairly certain it's been a dicey year for everyone. We seem to be on the cusp of better times and, while they can't come soon enough, we still are all compelled to soldier through. It's what we do--and, as Americans, at least, it seems to be something we do rather well. We have, after all, made it through everything together thus far.

So--else we sink--let's all keep pulling at the oars. Isn't that--"Greatest Generation" be damned--what we've always done as a country?

I raise my glass, after this horrific year, to the prospect of everyone's figurative boat rising on a tide of good fortune. May 2015 finally find the affirmation of everyone's dreams. Cheers!

Resolutions

Continued from p. 7

resolutions because they were so beneficial they are worth repeating. First, I commit to spending a base amount per week on outreach of some kind. Exceeding the base amount is fine, but dodging it is not. Regular outreach is vital. Secondly, troublesome clients need to be pruned out immediately. They are a drain on company resources and my peace of mind. Once a relationship goes sour, rarely recoups... better to chop it off and move on."

"I have resolved to remain as perfect as I am," said Marn Reich, an artist based in Three Rivers.

"My resolution is to work as hard as possible to connect with those who are looking to grow spiritually and to follow the way of Jesus Christ, to trust in him with all my heart, and not lean on my own understanding, but to acknowledge Him in all my ways, knowing and believing that he will direct my path," said Nick Anthony, outreach pastor at The ROAD Church, and the main force behind the annual Kids' Festival at the Visalia Convention Center.

"My New Year's resolution is to take a vacation," said Tulare County Auditor-Controller/Treasurer-Tax Collector/Registrar of Voters Rita Woodard. "It is the 100th year for Kiwanis so I will be attending the Kiwanis international convention in Indianapolis this spring to help celebrate all the children that Kiwanis has helped through the last 100 years!"

"I resolve this New Year to be more efficient using the technology that surrounds us, whether it is social media, apps or the software programs that we use," said Greg Torres, owner of Frank's Appliance in Visalia. "I will continue to make our customers our number one priority and will strive to seek different marketing avenues to capture new customers and keep them coming back. In an era of electronic communication, my goal as a business owner is to stand out, especially from my competition, therefore I want to begin sending thank you notes again, something we used to do all the time."

Nancy Lockwood, principal of the Lockwood Agency, resolves, "To slow down and enjoy the little blessings and miracles of every-day life. Short and sweet! We are on our way to Stanford where my brother in law will undergo another cancer surgery. Helps put things into perspective."

"My resolution for 2015 is to be a positive influence by showing a positive attitude that will provide encouragement to others and myself," said Exeter Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Sandy Blankenship.

"I pray for more peace and understanding in the world for 2015 and beyond," said Visalia Police Chief Colleen Mestas.

"In 2015, I plan to collaborate more," said Aaron Gomes, Sound N Vision Foundation executive director. "We'll be broadening Sound N Vision's scope beyond Tulare County. In fact, we're close to announcing our largest festival to date, happening in a nearby county. We'll be offering both youth music classes and concert events outside of Tulare County for the first time in 2015."

"For 2015, I resolve to be healthier by implementing healthy meal planning and cooking at least four dinners at home per week, using fresh and local ingredients," said Carolina Evangelo of Evangelo Communications. "Other priorities for 2015: become more diligent at recycling and develop a more detailed and long-term financial plan."

"With the regrettable truth that the American experiment is set on a poor course, held captive by intolerable politics, the heavy hand of a war-mongering, surveillance-state big government, a distracted populace, an Endangered Species Act seeking to endanger entire communities, a corrupted financial system devoured with greed and an array of national priorities cast in disarray and tortured logic, I stand resolute to be a voice of common sense; to defend against the tawdry bureaucratic thicket of bloated government; to pursue a path lined with integrity; to embrace optimism that our great country can rise above the malaise we find ourselves in and to pursue with an enduring commitment that I can arrange my tiny sphere of influence in a manner that allows people around me to be elevated by the good rather than trodden down by the bad," said Lee Cohen, general manager of Setton Pistachio of Terra Bella.

"Overall, I would like to play a role in the New Year to bring harmony and peace among all our people what ever ethnic group they belong to, with better communication and understanding of each other," said Armondo M. Apodaca, executive director of the Tulare Kings Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

Jessica Cavale, director of development for the Visalia Rescue Mission, resolves to: "Get more sleep (might be difficult with a baby in the house now), drink more water, travel to a new place, organize all my files at home and the office (this will take the entire year!), do less talking and more listening, read more, do less complaining and more encouraging, pause to enjoy the moments of life that so quickly pass us by, operate out of a spirit of gratitude, do some of the many 'crafty'/homemade projects that I've pinned on Pinterest, and... of course, I'm going to start working out."

"I resolve to keep going to the gym I joined last month after many years away," said Springville resident Dan Burg, the chair of American Mensa, the international high IQ society.

"My New Year's resolutions for 2015 are to get my CWP (concealed weapon permit), skate in my first roller derby bout, and run a marathon in Germany right before Oktoberfest...so I can feel good about partaking in the Oktoberfest festivities," said Visalia Rawhide General Manager Jennifer Pendergraft.

The planners of TulareSciFiCon resolve to, "Try to put on the best show possible for 2015. We are desperately looking for sponsors, donors and volunteers."

"I resolve to run 30 miles per week," said Valley Voice Publisher Joseph Oldenbourg.

"I no longer do New Year's resolutions since I quit smoking, drinking, went on a diet and lost the weight, and I eat healthy as much as possible," said Vincent B. Salinas, board member of the Visalia Chamber of Commerce and of the Tulare County Hispanic Roundtable. "The biggest challenge to keeping New Year's resolutions is keeping them. I wish all those who do the best of luck."

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Valley Voice
Valley Scene

Tulare County Symphony Welcomes Back Popular Violinist Steven Lin

Donna Orozco

The Tulare County Symphony will welcome back a popular violin soloist and also perform the tuneful "Pictures at an Exhibition" at its January 10 concert at 7:30pm at the Visalia Fox Theatre.

Young violinist Steven Lin was not the scheduled soloist for the delightful "Tombeau de Liberace" last season, but he filled in when the other soloist had to drop out at the last minute, according to symphony music director Bruce Kiesling. The audience and orchestra alike loved him.

Steven Lin

"So as a thank you to him, and as a special treat for our audience, I thought it would be nice to have him back for the charming and youthful Shostakovich concerto," said Kiesling. "He's a wonderful artist and great guy all around, and I know our audience will love having him back."

He will play Shostakovich's "Piano Concerto 2," which was written for the composer's 19-year-old son. Both were accomplished pianists. It is an uncharacteristically cheerful piece, much more so than most of Shostakovich's works. Many of the Russian composer's works are taut, angst-ridden and defiant in tone. However, this concerto is a gloriously free, wistful creation.

Kiesling calls the second piece on the program one of the greatest orchestral works ever written. "Mussorgsky's 'Pictures as an Exhibition' is nothing short of a tour de force for the orchestra. It is an amazing and thrilling work that takes the listener through an art gallery, experiencing a series of different images. These images are illustrated through a colorful, inventive, exciting and beautiful orchestral canvas."

A number of the 10 sections of "Pictures at an Exhibition" will be familiar to most audience members. It begins with the often-played "Promenade," and the last two sections are also very recognizable.

VIOLINIST continued on **19 »**

Golden Dragon Acrobats

Golden Dragon Acrobats to Bring 'Cirque Ziva' to Visalia Fox Theatre

Staff Reports

The Golden Dragon Acrobats will bring "Cirque Ziva" to the Visalia Fox Theatre stage for a 7:30pm performance on Saturday, January 17. The show will feature a company of 30 in exquisite costumes, continuing a Chinese cultural tradition with amazing stunts and acrobatic feats.

Chinese acrobatics were among the country's early art forms, a favorite art of the people in China. Even though acrobatics were recorded in history as far back as 4,000 years ago, it wasn't until 2,500 years ago that it gained popularity among the emperors.

Records of acrobatics can be found from the Warring States Period (475–221 BC) on the utensils and carvings on tombs, stones, bricks and temples. By the time of the Han Dynasty (221 BC –220 AD), acrobatics had developed more content and variety, and were nicknamed "the hundred tricks." Over the centuries, acrobatics had a strong influence on other forms of performance art: dance, opera, wushu and even sports.

Today, acrobatics serve an important role as part of the culture exchange between China and other Western nations. Acrobatic art portrays the hard work, endurance and courage emphasized in Chinese culture.

CIRQUE ZIVA continued on **19 »**

Mooney Grove Park is the home of two disc golf courses.

Disc Golf Courses Spring Up in Tulare County

Staff Reports

On any given day, you can see players with their bags full of discs, enjoying a round of disc golf at Mooney Grove Park, the home of both the Perry Championship Disc Golf Course and the Outback Disc Golf Course.

The Perry Champion Course was installed in 2005 and the Perry Outback Course was installed about a year later. Both courses, which were designed by Chuck Woody, also host prestigious annual tournaments.

"We have one of the biggest disc golf tournaments at Mooney Grove Park every Labor Day weekend," said Woody. "Out of over 300 events in California, the End of the Trail Classic Disc Golf Tournament is one of the elite tournaments of the year. This event is part of the Pro Disc Golf Association A-Tier, and out of the 300+ disc golf tournaments in California, only three are PDGA A-Tier events. These events raise money to attract professional disc golfers from all over the U.S. and even outside the country. We once had a guy come play our tournament all the way from Thailand."

Disc golf has been around since the early 1970s. The goal is the same as golf, to try and make each hole in the fewest shots, but disc golf has a metal basket instead of an actual hole. Players throw aerodynamic high-speed discs specially made for the game. (Don't call them Frisbees!) The discs include drivers, mid-range and putters, not to mention all the specialty discs, some which can be thrown more than 400 feet.

Disc golfers are very passionate about the game and players leave the parks or areas that house these disc golf courses better than they found them by picking up trash or reporting a problem in the park, according to Woody, who also designed a course at the old Kings River Park near the Kingsburg Gun

DISC GOLF continued on **24 »**

Children's 'Trout Fishing Derby' Set for January 10 at Plaza Park

Nancy Vigran

It's time for children to cast their lines into the water for the 2nd Annual Trout Fishing Derby at Plaza Park in Visalia on Saturday, January 10, from 8-10am.

Last year's derby was a big hit, as was the summer counterpart Catfish Derby, said Freddy Arias, Visalia Parks and Recreation supervisor.

Arias expects the event to be full with a limit of approximately 225 children, so early registration is encouraged. The purpose is not only a fun day for the family, but to introduce children to wildlife, he said.

A Visalia boy sits on his dad's lap while waiting for the fish to bite last January's Visalia Trout Fishing Derby at Plaza Park. Photo courtesy of Visalia Parks and Recreation.

"A lot of families cannot get up to the mountains," Arias said. "This brings the outdoor experience to them."

There are two categories, ages 8-15, and 7 and under. Under the Department of Fish and Game regulations, children are not required to have fishing licenses, as adults are, so entering is easy.

The Plaza Park pond will be stocked with trout approximately 24 hours prior to the derby. No one will be allowed to fish or disturb the pond prior to the event.

Each entrant is allowed to bring one or two family members with them to the pond; however, the entrant is to handle the fishing pole for casting and reeling in any fish. Winners are determined by the total weight of

FISHING DERBY continued on **24 »**

Hanford Fox Owner Hopes to Reopen Historic Theater Sometime in 2015

Steve Pastis

The Hanford Fox Theatre still has its doors closed, more than nine months after a partial ceiling collapse shut down the historic theater. Dan Humason, its owner and manager, is looking to reopen the Fox sometime this year, although he continues to face a complex and costly process.

"I'm at the mercy of government agencies and insurance companies," said Humason. "Right now, were going through negotiations with the government agency that deals with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). We don't know when negotiations will end."

Dan Humason

He explained that ADA regulations go through annual changes, and that the Fox Theatre, which was built in 1929, faces challenges with new issues such as angles and clearances. "We're meeting resistance from the law, but not from law enforcement," he said. "Law enforcement personnel have been very nice. They want us to get up and running."

The theater is installing a 10'x10' unisex bathroom in a neighboring rental property, at a cost of $50,000 to $60,000, to meet an ADA requirement.

But Humason is considering his options if becoming ADA compliant becomes unrealistic for the historic theater. "In order to be able to function, some theaters have called themselves private clubs," he said. "If the government says, 'You cannot operate for the general public,' then we may become a private theater club. We have a lot of ideas and we're not turning away any ideas."

Meanwhile, a lot of progress has been made on the original problem.

"In order to replace the ceiling, we had to replace everything above the ceiling, including the huge attic space," said Humason, adding that the attic included lighting, air-conditioning and air ducts. He expects the ceiling to be finished in February or March.

Still ahead is fixing the seats and the flooring below the collapse that "have scratches" and "cut-off pieces," and removing "an amazing amount of debris" from the attic, he said. "Just to get the debris out takes a whole crew."

So when does Humason think he will finally be able to open the doors of the Hanford Fox Theatre?

"There's no timetable set," he said. "There are a lot of people who want to know, but I don't know. If we open by summer, that's fine. If we open by fall, that's fine. Right now, some of my August shows I'm throwing to other theaters."

He added that affected shows include those featuring Merle Haggard and Diana Krall. He currently has a Valentine's Day show headlined by the Avett Brothers scheduled at the Visalia Fox Theatre, and he presented Alice Cooper at the Bob Hope Theater in Stockton on November 25.

Mike Beck Returns to Mavericks Coffee House in Visalia

Mavericks Coffee House will present a 7pm performance by Mike Beck on Saturday, January 17. Twelve years ago, Beck was one of the first entertainers to perform at Mavericks.

Mike Beck

As a high school student in Monterey, Beck became engrossed in music and the performers of the day such as Bob Dylan, The Byrds and The Band. He learned many of their songs and played them on an old, hand-me-down guitar. When he became a working cowboy on ranches in California, Nevada and Montana, he started writing and singing songs about the cowboy life.

Beck has six albums to his credit, performs at the Elko Cowboy Gathering, Monterey Cowboy Festival and other venues, and is a horse trainer. *Western Horseman* magazine developed a list of the "Best 13 Cowboy Songs" and two of them, "In Old California" and "Don't Tell Me," were written by Beck. He also formed a band, Mike Beck and the Bohemian Saints, which performs folk, rock and old country, paying homage to groups such as the Flying Burrito Brothers and the Grateful Dead. Beck is also a world-renowned horse clinician.

For tickets ($25) or more information, call Mavericks at 624-1400, or stop by at 238 E. Caldwell Avenue, Visalia.

Please Join Us for the
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Thursday, January 22, 2015 • 6:30 pm
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Visalia Players to Spoof Alfred Hitchcock's 'The 39 Steps'

Nancy Holley

Ready for a zany, fast-paced, hilarious start to 2015? If so, "The 39 Steps," presented by the Visalia Players, is for you. This spoof of Hitchcock's 1935 movie is British farce at its best. Director Leeni Mitchell has taken a well-deserved hiatus from musicals to present a comedy that has won Tonys for its performances on Broadway, among other awards.

Mitchell notes that the "show depends on the ability of the actors to switch characters on a dime, sometimes within the same scene. We went with simplicity on the set. Most of the scenes are created with 12 trunks, one chair, a rolling door frame and a window."

"The 39 Steps" requires 100-150 characters, according to online sources, with the majority of those characters portrayed by two cast members. Richard Hannay, the hero, if there is such a character in this show, is the only constant throughout. Played by Peter McGuire, Richard is under continuous stress. "He becomes embroiled with strange people and tries to stay one step ahead of those after him, maybe finding love in the process. Will he lose his mind over the situations he encounters?" asks McGuire.

Next in line is Lindsay Tweed, who portrays only three characters, leaving between 96-146 for the remaining two cast members. Tweed identifies Pamela, the femme fatale of her three characters, as the "traditional Hitchcock blonde – think 'North By Northwest.' She turns him into the police, is handcuffed to him, and knows she shouldn't love him because he is a murderer, but…" Her other two characters, Annabella and Margaret, require changes of accents that are challenging but fun, allowing her "to flex her acting skills."

Odran Gilheany and Henry Gonzales are Clowns 1 and 2 – all the remaining characters! They portray young/old and male/female – all with the flick of the wrist or the change of a hat. "The challenge is to provide the uniqueness that each character deserves," quips Gonzales.

"The quick costume and character changes are tricky. A lot happens in a short amount of time," says Gilheany, who supports the feelings of cast, crew and director as he notes, "'The 39 Steps' is spies, military, secrets, murders, James Bond, Get Smart and the Three Stooges all thrown into one."

At the January 18 matinee, "Back Stage at the Ice House" will be hosted by Sharon DeCoux, a veteran Visalia Player. Audience members will have an opportunity for a behind the scenes look at the show and the opportunity to ask questions and interact with cast and crew.

"The 39 Steps" runs for three weekends at the Ice House Theater at Race and Santa Fe in Visalia. Evening performances are at 7:30pm on January 9, 10, 16, 17, 23 and 24, and matinees are at 2pm on January 11, 18 and 25. To purchase tickets, go to the Visalia Players' website at www.visaliaplayers.org, their Facebook page "Visalia Community Players" or call 734-3900.

Kings Canyon Campsites Now Available by Reservation

Visitors are now able to make mid-sized group campsites reservations in Kings Canyon National Park online. Mid-sized group sites have been available for reservations for the 2015 camping season since December 10, and Crystal Springs mid-sized group sites will be available for reservations for the 2015 camping season beginning January 7.

The standard family campsites in Crystal Springs will still be available on a first come, first served basis by self-registration. Campers are able to make reservations at Recreation.gov up to a year in advanced for group sites.

There are 14 campgrounds in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. Most are first-come, first-serve with a maximum of six people allowed per site. Potwisha, Buckeye Flat, Lodgepole, Dorst Creek and certain group campsites are open to reservations and can accommodate from seven to 50 people. Visitors are able to make reservations up to six months in advance for standard campsites and up to one year in advance for group sites through Recreation.gov.

Lodgepole Campground. Photo courtesy NPS Photo/Dana Dierkes.

Additional first-come, first-serve dates outside of reservation dates may be added over the next few months. For additional information and campground maps, visit www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/campgrounds.htm.

Mike Wolfe and Frank Fritz of "American Pickers"

'American Pickers' is Coming to Visalia

Staff Reports

"American Pickers" will make a stop in Visalia in February to look for people with interesting stories, intriguing personalities and cool collectables.

"America Pickers" is History Channel's documentary series that explores the fascinating world of antique "picking." This popular show follows two of the most skilled pickers in the business, Mike Wolfe and Frank Fritz, as they embark on an epic road trips across the U.S. in search of America's most valuable antiques, ranging from motorcycles, classic cars and bicycles, to one-of-a-kind vintage memorabilia.

In February, Wolfe and Fritz will travel up and down California looking for great antiques and even better stories. If you have a large collection and would like to have them "pick" through your things, contact the Visalia Chamber of Commerce at 734-5876 or info@visalia-chamber.org. Include your name, phone number, address and a short description of your item or collection.

If selected, you and your items may appear in an upcoming episode of "American Pickers" on the History Channel. (Please note: no retail shops or flea markets will be chosen. This is for private collections only.)

For more details on the types of items that Wolfe and Fritz are looking for, visit the chamber website, www.visaliachamber.org.

Cirque Ziva

Continued from p. 17

The Golden Dragon Acrobats represent the best of this time-honored tradition, recognized throughout the United States and abroad as the premiere Chinese acrobatic touring company today. World-renowned impresario Danny Chang and choreographer Angela Chang combine award-winning acrobatics, traditional dance, spectacular costumes, ancient and contemporary music, and theatrical techniques to present a show of breathtaking skill and spellbinding beauty.

The Golden Dragons have traveled around to all 50 states and around the world to over 65 countries on five continents. The members of the current touring company, hailing from Henan and Hebei, China, have performed in all 48 lower U.S. states within the last five years alone, to sold-out audiences in nearly every major market in the country. The Golden Dragons remain the only Chinese acrobatic company touring year-round in the United States.

Tickets are $21 -$29 for adults, $15 for children. For tickets or more information, call the box office at 625-1369 or visit www.foxvisalia.org.

Sound N Vision to Bring White Glove Service, Haunted Summer to Cellar Door

Sound N Vision will present White Glove Service at The Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia, on Saturday, January 3 at 8pm.

White Glove Service

The music of Fresno's White Glove Service covers a lot of ground. Reggae, rock, ska, funk, dub and hip-hop are all elements of their live show. The hefty six-member group consists of Jake (vocals), Aaron (guitar and bass), Stilz (bass, vocals and guitar), Greg (sax), Jose (drums) and Andrew (samples and dubs).

Haunted Summer

Tickets for the 21+ show are $7.

On Saturday, January 10, Los Angeles-based Haunted Summer will headline an 8pm show at The Cellar Door.

Haunted Summer crafts languid pop music, adorned with orchestral strings and electronic textures. Their brand of dream pop feels timeless, with just the right amount of youthful nostalgia to woo your ears into submission. Moody's smooth, light as air vocals captivate like a siren of the sea, while the arrangements are lush and seductive, but never pushy.

Opening this early show are Visalia natives Burning Bridges. The band's heavy '90s indie guitar influences range from Built to Spill to Sunny Day Real Estate.

Tickets for the 21+ show are $5.

Violinist

Continued from p. 17

Mussorgsky wrote the piece as a tribute to artist Viktor Hartmann. Both men were devoted to the cause of an intrinsically Russian art and quickly became friends. When Hartmann died from an aneurysm in 1873 at age 39, Mussorgsky was shaken. An exhibition of over 400 of Hartmann's art pieces was mounted in St. Petersburg, which inspired Mussorgsky's work.

The suite consists of musical depictions of 10 of Hartmann's paintings interspersed with the recurring Promenade theme that represents a visitor—in this case the composer himself—strolling through the exhibition. The powerful nature of the "Promenade," Mussorgsky acknowledged in one of his letters, reflects his own large physique.

The audience is invited to come at 6:45pm to hear Kiesling's pre-concert talk.

Tickets are $30 to $39.50 at the symphony office, 208 W. Main St., Suite D, Visalia, downstairs in Montgomery Square. Student prices are $10. Tickets are also available at 732-8600 and at www.tularecountysymphony.com.

Visalia Chamber Christmas Tree Auction Raises over $235,000 for Local Charities

Staff Reports

The Christmas wishes of 24 local charities and non-profit organizations were granted, with almost a quarter of a million dollars in donations raised at the 34th annual Christmas Tree Auction held December 12 at the Visalia Convention Center. The spirit of giving was evident at the "Babes in Toyland"-themed event as more than 1,000 guests raised $60,000 more for local charities than last year.

After 34 years of raising funds for local charities, the Christmas Tree Auction has become a legacy in Visalia as non-profits use this black-tie celebration to advance their mission through the donations they receive and awareness they generate. For many, this event is the primary fundraiser they rely on to keep their operations running throughout the year.

Among the organizations benefitting from the event were:

The Visalia Rescue Mission, which raised the most funds with their live auction tree, $111,000.

The highest-selling silent auction item raised $600 for the Jeff Barnes Brain Injury Foundation, and the most profitable silent trees brought in $1,100 each for Habitat for Humanity of Tulare County and Mt. Whitney Jazz Band Boosters.

Eventgoers check out one of the trees at the 2014 Christmas Tree Auction.

Fine wine and other delicacies were available at the 2014 Christmas Tree Auction.

Back again this year was the Groppetti Automotive Family Giving Tree, a sponsored tree that was raffled off, with individuals purchasing tickets for a chance to take the tree home and direct the proceeds to the charity of their choice. The Giving Tree raised approximately $2,800 in proceeds, which the winning ticket holder donated to the Visalia Rescue Mission.

Attendance at the Christmas Tree Auction was very strong this year with more than 600 people enjoying the VIP dinner and an additional 400 joining the general admission party. Adding to the event were the table centerpieces donated by local businesses that were made up of toys and stuffed animals conveying this year's theme 'Babes in Toyland.' After the event all of the toys were donated to Toys for Tots at Giant Chevrolet and the teddy bears were donated to the Fire Fighters Association.

Visalia Chamber Announces 'Alaska Adventures' Trip for August 18-28

Staff Reports

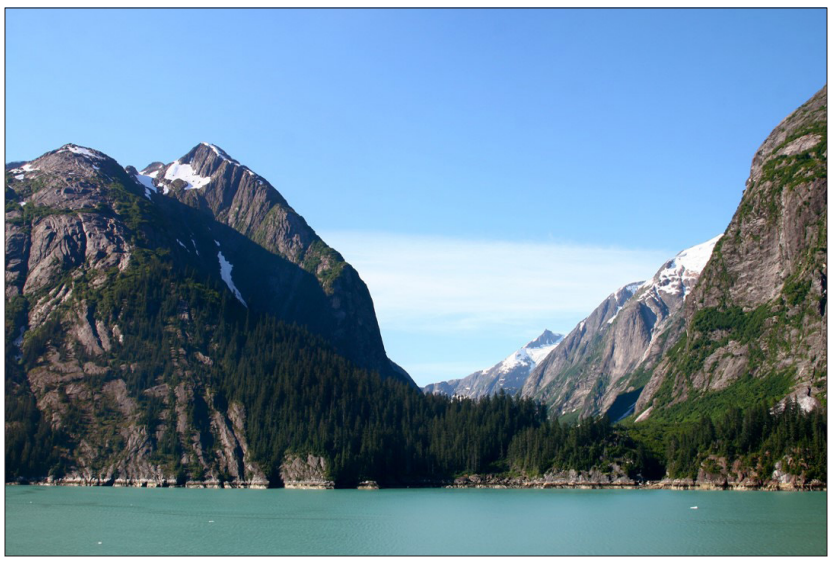
The Visalia Chamber of Commerce has announced a new addition in its 2015 lineup of tours, Alaska Adventures, an 11-day trip departing August 18 and returning August 28. The tour includes 25 meals, first class hotel and cruise ship accommodations, a professional tour guide and roundtrip airfare from Fresno International Airport.

The pool aboard the Celebrity Solstice cruise ship.

Alaska Adventures begins in Seattle with a sightseeing tour of the "Emerald City," and features an elevator ride to the top of the Space Needle and leisure time to visit museums and renowned restaurants. No trip to Seattle would be complete without a visit to Pike Place Market, where shoppers enjoy a year-round farmer's market full of locally produced food.

In Seattle, travelers will board the Celebrity Solstice cruise ship to begin a journey into the Alaskan Wilderness. The Celebrity Solstice boasts numerous onboard activities and entertainment.

Once in Alaska, travelers will explore Ketchikan, the "Salmon Capital of the World" and the "City of Totems." From Ketchikan, travelers sail northward, passing through the spectacular Tracy Arm Fjord on their way to Juneau, and seeing glaciers, breathtaking mountains, waterfalls and sheer rack walls, along with Alaska's largest icebergs. During the last stop in Alaska, travelers will discover the "Gateway to the Klondike" as they tour the historic city of Skagway and learn about the Alaskan Gold Rush days. Finally, they will make their way south to Victoria, British Columbia, one of the oldest and most beautiful cities in Canada's Pacific Northwest, for a final day of tours before returning home.



Tracy Arm Fjord

An Alaska Adventures slideshow will be presented on January 6 at the Visalia Chamber of Commerce office, 220 N. Santa Fe St., from noon to 1pm. The presentation will feature pictures of destinations and an opportunity to talk to a tour representative. Information for this trip is at the chamber office and at www.visaliachamber.org.

This tour is presented by our travel partner Collette Vacations. For more information on the chamber travel program, call Nicola Wissler at 734-5876, or visit www.visaliachamber.org.

Suncrest Bank to Present Deanna Saldana Art Exhibit

Staff Reports

Local artist Deanna Saldana will have a new exhibit at Suncrest Bank, 400 W. Center Ave., Visalia, from January 3 to March 30.

Suncrest Bank has joined a growing list of downtown merchants who support the arts by giving local artists a venue to display their work. The partnership between artist and merchant creates a great opportunity to display art in public places, change up the merchant's environment and give customers another reason to visit various businesses downtown.

Saldana's artwork started with pencil portraits of people from various cultures. Over the years, she has experimented with different mediums including watercolor, pastel and acrylic, and has created art in both two and three dimensions.

Saldana was born in Canada and moved to California in 1988 with high hopes of making it as a singer. She traveled the world with recording artist Brenda Russell and performed with various stage bands in Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Reno. She is presently working as the worship leader of the Rock Christian Family Church in Visalia.

Deanna Saldana's work will be featured at Suncrest Bank.

Much of her time is spent helping local non-profits create decorations for fundraising events, including the Creative Center Mardi Gras, Boys and Girls Club fundraisers and the Visalia Chamber of Commerce Christmas Tree Auction. Saldana started working for Habitat for Humanity of Tulare County in 2007 and is employed as their resource development director.

"Native Dancer Female," by Deanna Saldana.

Jon Ginsburg Gallery to Present 'Bold & Beautiful - The Art of Brenda Allison'

Staff Reports

The Creative Center's Jon Ginsburg Gallery will welcome Brenda Allison as its guest artist for January and February. Allison is a versatile and prolific painter who works in oils, acrylic and watercolors. Her work is recognized by her exceptional use of color and ability to create depth with her unique layering of materials.

A Valley native living and working in Fresno, Allison draws inspiration from California's agriculture, which influences her work in abstracted forms. She has worked in the design industry where she explored unusual combinations of textures and patterns, driven by bold color. These fundamentals as a designer became the foundation of her art. Innovative use of unfamiliar materials and the ancient method of gold leafing add stunning contrasts to her beautiful bold pieces.

Allison's work has been commissioned internationally. She created 105 original paintings for The Hotel Venetian in Macao, China, and for The Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas. She also had work commissioned for cruise ships. She is a "published artist" with her work available through several galleries locally. Many of her paintings grace the homes of her collectors, as well as many commercial locations around the Valley.

The opening reception will be held from 6-8pm on Friday, January 9. The show will run January 5-February 27. Gallery hours are 9am to 3pm weekdays. The Jon Ginsburg Gallery is located at 410 E. Race in Visalia. Enter through the business office at 606 N. Bridge St. For more information, call 733-9329.

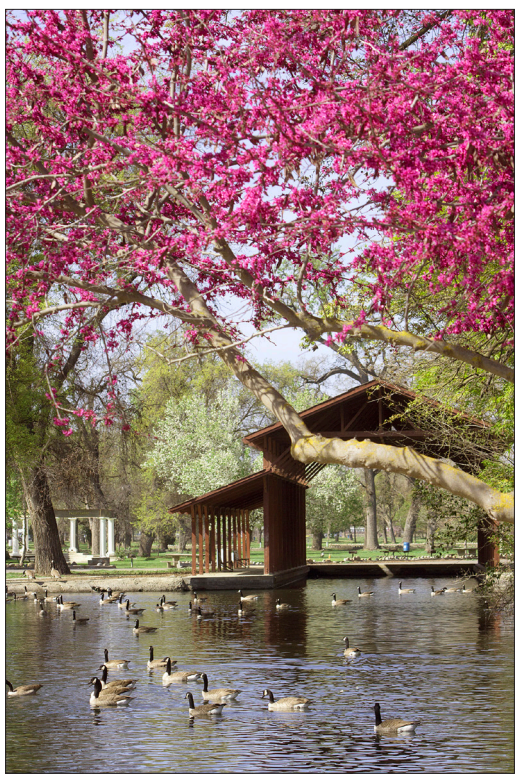
The Creative Center is a non-profit community arts center for adults with developmental disabilities with the mission of fostering self-expression, self-worth and personal growth through the arts, community integration, providing cultural resources to the community, and recognizing the individual's value and contribution.

"Copper Coins" by Brenda Allison.

Annual 'Tulare County: Varied Impressions' Exhibit to Open January 8

Staff Reports

The annual "Tulare County: Varied Impressions" art exhibit will open January 8 in the Heritage Art Gallery of the Tulare Historical Museum. This unique show features the work of local artists depicting their "impressions" of people and places in Tulare County in their paintings, drawings and photographs. The show continues through February 28.



Jeri Burzin's work will be featured at Tulare County Varied Impressions

A reception for the artists will be held in the gallery from 5-7pm on Thursday, January 8. The reception is free and open to the public.

The museum is located at 444 W. Tulare Ave., Tulare. Hours of operation are 10am to 4 pm, Thursday through Saturday. The museum will also be open the third Sunday of the month for free from 12:30-4pm. Admission is $5 for adults, $3 for seniors 55+ and Southern California Automobile Club members, $2 for students, and free for Tulare City Historical Society members and children under 5 years old.

For more information, call 686-2074 or visit www.tularehistoricalmuseum.org.

Call for Entries Issued for Sofa Art XX

Staff Reports

Next month, Sofa Art will return for its 20th consecutive year. The theme will be "Sofa Art Highways & Byways."

Think of the famous roadways people travel and the popular roadside stops along the way. Route 66 and the Pacific Coast Highway may come to mind – or perhaps a well-worn road a little nearer to home. Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* could even serve as an inspiration.

The 2014 Sofa Art Show featured this work by Brianna Pauls.

A road trip isn't only about the destination and the sights along the way. Often it's as much about the experience, the people we meet along the way and the things we learn about ourselves. Of course, this is a Sofa Art show, and it goes without saying that this is art "about the sofa" and not to "complement the sofa." All artworks must include the obligatory couch, davenport, recliner, daybed, divan, etc.

As always, the Sofa Art exhibition is open to all – artists and non-artists alike –with no entry fee for artwork submissions. Entries are due to Arts Visalia by Saturday, January 31. For an entry form or more information, visit Arts Visalia, 214 E. Oak Ave., Visalia, call 739-0905 or email artsvisalia@sbcglobal.net.

The exhibition will run February 4-27. The opening reception will be held from 6-8pm on Friday, February 6.

ART CALENDAR

Through Jan. 3 – Paintings by Nadi Spencer
Acrylics and watercolors by Nadi Spencer of Three Rivers are on display at the Tulare Historical Museum, 444 W. Tulare. The museum is open Thursday through Saturday. For information, visit tularehistoricalmuseum.org.

Through Jan. 3 – Annual Winter Show
An exhibit featuring new works never before shown by the Kings County Art League will be held at the Marcellus Gallery of the Kings Art Center, 605 N. Douty St., Hanford. For information, call 584-1065.

Through Jan. 18 – Celebration Exhibit
Main Gallery Artists Betty Berk, Toni Best, Jeri Burzin, Joy Collier, Elsah Cort, Laurie Gorman, Beckie Nava, Deborah Nolan, Lynn Ramires, Deanna Saldana and Ginny Wilson are featured at Café 225. For more information, visit www.maingalleryvisalia.com or call 967-8635.

Through March 14 – 7th Annual Miniatures Works of Art
The Tulare City Historical Society will host this exhibition at the Tulare Historical Museum, 444 W. Tulare Ave., Tulare. The museum is open 10-4pm Thursday through Saturday.

Jan. 2 – Toni Best and Linda Hengst Reception – 5-7pm
There will be an opening reception at Michael's Jewelry on 316 W. Main Street of work by Toni Best and Linda Hengst from 5-7pm. Their creations show the "inspiration" that has formulated each piece.

Jan. 3 – March 30 – Deanna Saldana Art Exhibit – 8:30am-5pm
The works of local artist Deanna Saldana will be on exhibit at Suncrest Bank, 400 W. Center Ave., Visalia. For information, visit maingalleryvisalia.wordpress.com.

Jan. 3 – 1st Saturday – 11am-5pm
Artists of Three Rivers have joined together to create a day of food, fun and art on the first Saturday of every month featuring artists, restaurants, gift shops, galleries and more. Watch the artist paint or listen to musicians or storytellers. For information, visit 1stsaturdaytr.com.

Jan. 5 – Feb. 27 – Bold & Beautiful - The Art of Brenda Allison – 9am-3pm
Jon Ginsburg Gallery welcomes guest artist for January through February. The exhibit features oils, acrylics and watercolors. For information, call 733-9329.

Jan. 8-Feb. 28 – Tulare County: Varied Impressions
Tulare City Historical Society will hold its annual Tulare County: Varied Impressions art exhibit in the Heritage Art Gallery, 444 W. Tulare Ave. A reception for the artists will be held from 5 to 7 pm Jan. 8. It is free. For information, call 686-2074.

Jan. 9 – Guest Artist Reception – 6-8pm
A reception will be held to honor Brenda Allison of Fresno whose works will be on exhibit at the Jon Ginsburg Gallery, 410 E. Race Ave., Visalia through Feb. 27. The gallery is open Monday through Friday, 10am-3pm. For information, visit thecreativecenter-visalia.org.

Jan. 14 & 28 – Crafty Corner: Knit and Crochet Group – 10:30am-12pm
Learn and practice fiber arts on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at Visalia Branch Library. For information, call 713-2703.

Jan. 17 – Ekphrastic Poetry Workshop – 1:30pm
A workshop of art-inspired poetry will be held at the Visalia Branch Library. For information, call 713-2723.

March 5 – Student Art Show Opens – 4-6pm
Tulare Historical Museum will open its annual Student Art Show with a reception for the students and their families at the Heritage Art Gallery, 444 W. Tulare Ave. The show will run through April 4. For information, visit tularehistoricalmuseum.org.

Calendar

MUSIC

Jan. 2 – Full Coverage – 9pm
The Valley's newest funk band will perform at The Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St. For information, visit cellardoor101.com.

Jan. 3 – White Glove Service – 8-10pm
White Glove Service will perform at The Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia. Tickets are $7 for 21 and over.

Jan. 7, 14, 21, & 28 – Open Mic Night – 7:30-9:30pm
Ronnie Nix will lead open mic night at Farmer's Fury Tasting Room, 358 West D Street, Lemoore, every Wednesday evening. For information, visit farmersfurywines.com.

Jan. 8, 15, 22 & 29 – Tribute to Motown – 7-10pm
On Thursdays, Herb Mallory and the Crawdads are featured in a Tribute to Motown at Crawdaddys Visalia, 333 E. Main St. For information, visit CrawdaddysVisalia.com.

Jan. 8, 15, 22 & 29 – South 65 Country Rock Band – 8pm-12:30am
South 65 will perform every Thursday night at the Republik Lounge & Nightclub, 115 N. Locust St., Visalia. For information, visit facebook.com/RepublikLoungeNightclub.

Jan. 9 – Run4Cover – 9pm
Run4Cover will return to The Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia. For information, visit cellardoor101.com.

Jan. 10 – TCSO The Russia House – 7:30pm
Shostakovich: Piano Concerto No. 2 featuring pianist Steven Lin will be featured at Tulare County Symphony Orchestra performance "The Russia House." The evening closes with "Pictures at an Exhibition." TCSO performs at the Visalia Fox Theatre. For information, visit foxvisalia.org.

Jan. 10 – Haunted Summer – 8-10pm
Haunted Summer and Burning Bridges will be featured at the early show at The Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia. Tickets for the 21+ concert are $5 and are available at ticketweb.com.

Jan. 16 – Karaoke – 6:30-8:30pm
Every Third Friday each month, Karaoke is featured at 210 Cafe. For information, call 739-9009.

Jan. 17 – Mike Beck – 7pm
Mike Beck will perform at Mavericks Coffee House, 238 E. Caldwell, Visalia. For information, visit mavericks coffeehouse.com.

Jan. 24 – Stage Life – 8-10pm
Stage Life will perform at The Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia. Tickets for the 21+ concert are $5.

Feb. 6 – Tulare-Kings Counties Mass Choir – 6pm
Tulare-Kings Counties Mass Choir presents its Silver Anniversary 25th Annual Gospel Music Concert and Gala at the Visalia Fox. Tickets, $15-25, are available at foxvisalia.org.

Feb. 14 – Avett Brothers in Concert – 8pm
The Avett Brothers will perform at the Visalia Fox Theatre on Valentine's Day. Tickets available by calling 625-1369.

EVENTS

Jan. 3 – Tulare Public Library Book Sale – 10am-2pm
The Tulare Public Library holds a book sale on the first Saturday of each month in the Library Cafe. For information visit tularepubliclibrary.org.

Jan. 3 – 1st Saturday in Three Rivers – 11am-5pm
On the first Saturday of each month, artists, restaurants and merchants of Three Rivers open their doors for a town wide celebration. For information, visit www.1stsaturdaytr.com.

Jan. 3 – Battle to Xtreme Combat – 4-10pm
Hanford Chamber of Commerce, Parks and Recreation and CHP Officer Dean Esquibel Memorial Association will present a Lucha Xtreme Pro Wrestling event at Hanford Civic Auditorium. Tickets are on sale at LuchaXtreme.com.

Jan. 6 – Women in Business – Noon
Exeter Chamber of Commerce will hold a brown bag luncheon. Tickets are $5. For information, call 592-2919.

Jan. 6 – Alaska Adventure – 12-1pm
A slide show presentation on the Alaska Adventure tour will be given at the Visalia Chamber of Commerce office, 220 N. Santa Fe. The presentation will feature the highlights of a tour planned for August 18 through August 28. For information, call 734-5876, or visit www.visaliachamber.org.

Jan. 7 – AMVETS Ribbon Cutting Ceremony – 5:15-7pm
A grand opening for AMVETS will be held at 157 S. K St., Tulare. For information, call 734-5876.

Jan. 8 – Exeter Chamber Mixer – 5pm
A social networking event will be held at Hometown Emporium, 145 E. Pine St., Exeter. For information, visit exeterchamber.com.

Jan 10-11 – Rocky Mountain Gun Show – 9am
The Rocky Mountain Gun Show will be held from 9am to 5pm on Saturday, and 9am to 4pm on Sunday at Visalia Convention Center. For information, visit rockymountaingunshow.com.

Jan. 10, 17, 24 & 31 – Training for Tax Preparers – 9am-4pm
CSET will offer a workshop for volunteer tax assistance program, which helps low-income families file their tax returns for free. The program will be held at the CSET Office 312 N.W. 3rd Ave., Visalia and 1063 W. Henderson Ave., Porterville. To volunteer, call 741-4628.

Jan. 10 – Girl's Day Off Seminar – 11:30am-2pm
This is the first of four seminars to be held in 2015 by Women of the City at The Depot in Visalia. Living without baggage will be discussed. Tickets, $75, are available on eventbrite.com.

Jan. 12 – Irrigation Manager or Installation Technician Training – 5:30-9:30pm
West Hills Community College in Lemoore will offer 250 hours of irrigation training. For information, call 934-2762.

Jan. 13 – 2015 Employment Law and Workplace Safety Compliance Update – 11:30am-2pm
Attorney Brett Sutton of Sutton Hague Law Corporation and James Boretti of Boretti Integrated Safety Solutions will present a conference at Holiday Inn, Visalia. Cost is $35 and includes lunch. For reservations, call 734-5876.

Jan. 14 – Open House for Owens Valley Career Development Center – 10am-3pm
The OVCDC will host an open house at 2370 W. Whitendale Ave., Visalia.

Jan. 14 – Non-Profits Tax Laws – 10am-Noon
How to Comply with Complicated Sales and Use Tax Laws Regarding Non-Profits will be discussed at the Tulare Chamber of Commerce Office, 220 E. Tulare St.

Jan. 14 – Lemoore Chamber Luncheon - 12pm
CPA Tracy Bressler will be the featured speaker at the Lemoore Chamber of Commerce Luncheon to be held at Tachi Palace. Bressler will be discussing 2015 tax laws. Tickets are $12 in advance or $17 at the door. For tickets, call 924-6401.

Jan. 15 – Grow Your Business with E-Marketing – 9-11am
Constant Contact will present a workshop at the Visalia Chamber of Commerce, 220 N. Santa Fe. Cost is $20 for members. The workshop is one of four planned by the Visalia Chamber to help businesses prepare for the New Year. For information, visit visaliachamber.org.

Jan. 16 - COS Giants Baseball Banquet Fundraiser – 5:30pm
Meet the Giants Dinner/Dance and Silent Auction, a fundraiser for the College of Sequoia's Baseball Team, will be held at the Visalia Convention Center. Tickets are $50. For information, visit baseball.cos.edu.

Jan. 17 & 18 – Gem, Mineral & Jewelry Show – 10am-4pm
The Tule Gem & Mineral Society Gemboree will be held at the Veteran's Memorial Center, Highway 65 in Exeter. The event features 10 dealers, gems, grab bags, door prizes and silent auction. Children receive a polished rock when completing the treasure hunt.

Jan. 19 & 20 – Scrub and Shoe Sale
Kaweah Delta Hospital Guild will present a Scrub and Shoe Sale by Life Uniforms in the Blue Room of the basement of Kaweah Delta Hospital, 400 W. Mineral King. Proceeds will benefit patient care equipment purchases. The event will be held from 7am to 4pm Jan. 19 and from 6:30am to 4pm Jan 20. For information, call 734-3109.

Jan. 19 MLK Day Celebration – 10am
The Hanford Branch of the NAACP will hold the 9th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration at Hanford Civic Auditorium. A processional march around Civic Plaza and music, readings and guest speakers are featured. Congressman David G. Valadao will be the keynote speaker.

Jan. 20 - KDHCD Service Awards Banquet
Kaweah Delta Health Care District will present its Service Awards Banquet at Visalia Convention Center.

Jan. 20 – Integrity Credit Ribbon Cutting – 10am
Visalia Chamber of Commerce will hold a ribbon-cutting for Integrity Credit at 518 N. Locust St. For information, call 734-5876.

Jan. 21 – 2015 Stop Harassment Seminar 7:30-10am
Pacific Employers will present a seminar at Lamp Liter Inn, 3300 W. Mineral King Ave., Visalia. Cost is $35 for Visalia Chamber members and $45 for non-members. Registration includes breakfast. The workshop is one of four planned by the Visalia Chamber to help businesses prepare for the New Year. For information, visit visaliachamber.org.

Jan. 21 – 2015 Pistachio Day Conference – 8am-4:30pm
The statewide Pistachio Day Conference will be held at the Visalia Convention Center. The event is designed to deliver the latest research-based production practices. Registration is $40 before Jan. 5, $60 after and $80 at the door. For information, visit ucanr.edu/sites/pistachioday.

Jan. 22 – The Great Wine vs. Beer Showdown – 5:30pm
An evening of wine and beer tasting, appetizers and music will raise funds to support the Farm Bureau. The event will be held at the Hanford Civic Auditorium. Tickets, $50, available at brownpapertickets.com/event/925493.

Jan. 23 – Lemoore Chamber of Commerce Banquet
Bob Clement, FAST Credit Union and Kings Lions Club will be among those honored at the chamber's installation and awards banquet. Reservations must be made by Jan. 16. Tickets, $50 or $450 for a table of 8, can be purchased by calling 924-6401.

Jan. 23-25 – The GSSA Championships
The Golden Sate Spirit Association will hold a two-day competition featuring all divisions for all star cheer, school, rec and dance teams at the Visalia Convention Center.

Jan. 24 – 5th Annual Tule Fog 5K/10K Run – 7am
Visalia Parks and Recreation kicks off the New Year with the famous Tule Fog along St. John's River. More than 500 runners compete every year in male and female divisions. Participants who sign up by Jan. 15 are guaranteed a long-sleeved race shirt. Cost to enter is $25/$35 after Jan. 14. For information, visit liveandplayvisalia.com.

Jan. 29 – 7th Annual Project Homeless Connect
A one-day event designed to provide housing, services and a forum will be held at four locations in Tulare county: Pentecostal Church of God, 323 E. 11th St., Hanford; Commission Honorifica Building, 466 E. Putnam Ave., Porterville; TDES Hall, 515 North I Street, Tulare; and Veteran's Memorial Building, 609 W. Center Ave., Visalia. Volunteers are needed. For information, visit kingstularecoc.org/projects/2015-phc-event.

Jan. 29 – Local Motion Awards Luncheon – 11:30am
The Tulare County Association of Governments will hold its 4th Annual Local Motion Awards Luncheon at the Visalia Convention Center. Registration is $35, or $45 after Jan. 4. For information, visit tularecog.org.

Jan. 30 - Rotary Foundation Dinner – 5pm
Rotary District 5230 will hold its "Million Dollar Dinner" at the Visalia Convention Center. Proceeds will benefit The Rotary Foundation. For tickets and information, visit rotary5230.org.

Jan. 31 & Feb. 7 – 2015 Kings County Academic Decathlon – 7:30am
A contest of academic strength among students from Kings County high schools will be held. To volunteer as a judge, call 589-7074.

Jan. 31 - VUSD Winter Formal
The Visalia Unified School District will hold the Winter Formal at the Visalia Convention Center. Tickets can be purchased at each high school's finance office.

See more events online ourvalleyvoice.com

COMMUNITY

Jan. 2 – First Friday with a Physician – 12–1:30pm
On the first Friday of each month, Adventist Medical Center in Hanford hosts a physician seminar series. For information, call 589-2032.

Jan. 3 – 1st Saturday Book Sale – 10am-2pm
Friends of the Tulare Public Library hold a book sale on the first Saturday of each month. For information, visit tularepubliclibrary.org.

Jan. 3, 10, 17, 24 – Visalia Senior Center Dance – 7-10pm
Every Saturday dance to the music of Bobby Seals & The Whiskey River Band at the Visalia Senior Center, 310 N. Locust. Cost is $7 at the door. Potluck meals are held. For information, call 635-0284 or 906-6088.

Jan. 5-Feb. 23 – Morning Yoga – 7-8am
A yoga class will be offered at Whitendale Community Center in Visalia on Mondays. The cost is $35. Another class will also be offered on Thursdays. To register, visit liveandplayvisalia.org.

Jan. 5-Feb. 23 – R.I.P.P.E.D. – 9:30-10:30am
A high-intensity workout that combines Resistance, Interval, Power, Plyometrics, Endurance and Diet will be offered Mondays and Wednesdays at Anthony Community Center in Visalia. The cost is $35 and is open to all fitness levels. For information, visit liveandplayvisalia.com.

Jan. 5 – Hall of Fame Nomination Deadline
Nominations for the Fifth Annual Porterville College Foundation Hall of Fame Banquet will be accepted through Jan. 5. The banquet will be held March 7 at the River Island Country Club. Nomination forms are available at portervillecollege.edu.

Jan. 6-Feb. 12 – CORE Challenge – 12-12:45pm
Traci Dykstra will teach a class that focuses on the waistline, tightening the lower abdominals and strengthening the lower back. The $35 class meets Tuesdays and Thursdays at Anthony Community Center, Dance Studio. For information, visit liveandplayvisalia.com.

Jan. 6 – Cancer Caregiver Support Group – 1:30-3pm
This Kaweah Delta Cancer Caregiver Support group meets at Sequoia Regional Cancer Center, 4945 W. Cypress Ave., Visalia, on the first Tuesday of every month. For information, call 624-3225.

Jan. 6-Feb. 12 – Intro to Boot Camp – 5:30-6:30am
Traci Dykstra and Carrie Fawkes will introduce participants to a high-energy workout interlaced with weights and resistance. The class is offered Tuesdays and Thursdays at Anthony Community Center Gym. To register, visit liveandplayvisalia.org.

Jan. 6 – First Tuesday Book Club – 6:30-7:45pm
The first Tuesday Book Club meets at the Visalia Branch Library Blue Room For information, visit 713-2707.

Jan. 6 – Exeter Friends of the Library Meeting – 7pm
The Friends of the Library will meet at Exeter Library, 230 E. Chestnut Ave.

Jan. 7, 14, 21 & 28 – Medicare Extra Help – 1-4pm
Every Wednesday, Tulare Senior Center offers free counseling for Medicare beneficiaries. Help with prescription plans, claims, appeals and general information. This program is sponsored by Kings/Tulare AAA HICAP. Appointments available by calling 623-0199.

Jan. 8 – Valley Oak Garden Club Meeting – 9:30am
The Tulare Historical Museum will host the Valley Oak Garden Club at Heritage Art Gallery, 444 W. Tulare Ave. For information, visit tularehistoricalmuseum.org.

Jan. 8 – Valley Oak Quilt Guild – 11am
Valley Oak Quilt Guild will meet at Tulare Community Church, 1820 N. Gem in Tulare. For information, visit valleyoakqg.org.

Jan. 8 & 22 – Oakland Raiders Boosters Meeting – 7pm
Tulare Kings Counties Oakland Raiders Boosters meet on the second and fourth Thursdays each month at Elks Lodge, 3100 W. Main St., Visalia.

Jan. 9 – Winter Softball Leagues Registration Deadline
The deadline to register for the Visalia Winter Men's and Co-Ed Softball Leagues is Jan. 9. The leagues start Jan. 28. To register visit liveandplayvisalia.com.

Jan. 9 – Winter Co-Ed Volleyball Registration Deadline
The deadline to register is Jan. 9. The league starts Jan. 19. To register visit liveandplayvisalia.com.

Jan. 9 – Winter Men's Basketball Registration Deadline
The deadline to register for the Visalia Winter Men's Baskeball League is Jan. 9. The league starts Jan. 22. To register visit liveandplayvisalia.com.

Jan. 9 – Graphic Novel Club – 4-5pm
The Graphic Novel Club will meet at the Tulare Public Library in the Olympic Room. The group meets on the second Friday of each month. For information, call 685-4500.

Jan. 10 – Second Saturday Book Club – 11am-noon
The club meets in the Charter Room of the Tulare Public Library, 475 North M St. To register for book clubs, call 685-4503 or stop by the research and information desk.

Jan. 11 – Black Bear Diner Blood Drive – 9am-1pm
Black Bear Diner will host a Central California Blood Center drive at 900 S. Mooney Blvd. All donors will receive a free individual pie.

Jan. 11 – Second Sunday Seminars – 2-3pm
The Sarah Mooney Museum features seminars on the second Sunday every month. The programs focus on specific elements of turn-of-the-century life in the Lemoore/Kings County area. The museum, located at 542 West D Street in Lemoore, is open every Sunday afternoon from 12-3pm for docent-led tours and special activities. For information, visit sarahamooneymuseum.com.

Jan. 13 – Sequoia Garden Club – 1pm
The Sequoia Garden Club will meet at the Visalia Branch of the Tulare County Library.

Jan. 13 – Yappy Hour – 5-9pm
Happy Hour is on the second Tuesday at The Planning Mill Artisan Pizzeria, 514 E. Main Street. A donation from proceeds will benefit the Valley Oak SPCA. Well-behaved, leashed pets are welcome on the patio.

Jan. 13-Feb. 17 – Salsa Dance – 6:15-7:15pm
Jovita Metts and Juan Cuevas will teach salsa, the social dance that originated on the island of Cuba, at Anthony Community Center. Cost is $70 per couple of $40 per person. To register, visit liveandplayvisalia.org.

Jan. 13 – Exeter Friends of the Library – 7pm
The Exeter Friends of the Library meets on the second Tuesday each month at the Exeter Branch Library, 230 E. Chestnut. For information, visit exeterfriends.weebly.com.

Jan. 13 – Government Affairs Meeting – 7:15pm
Visalia Chamber of Commerce Advocacy Accountability Action committee will hold its meeting at the Chamber office, 220 N. Santa Fe St. For information, call 734-5876.

Jan. 15 – YEA CEO Roundtable – 6pm
Visalia Chamber of Commerce will hold a roundtable at Tulare City Chambers, 220 E. Tulare Ave.

Jan. 16 – Quail Park Blood Drive – 1-4pm
A community blood drive will be held in the Wellness Center of Quail Park Retirement Village, 4520 W. Cypress Ave., Visalia. For information or to register, call 624-3503.

Jan. 16-March 13 – Budget Meal Planning – 3-5pm
The Visalia Branch Library will offer classes on Stretching the Food Dollar every other Friday in the Blue Room. Registration is not required.

Jan. 17 – Black Bear Diner Blood Drive – 9am-1pm
Black Bear Diner will host a Central California Blood Center drive at 1161 E. Tulare Ave., Tulare. All donors will receive a free individual pie.

Jan. 17 – Tulare-Kings Writers – 10am
Tulare Kings Writers will meet at the Visalia Branch Library. Info, 280-9774.

Jan. 17 – A&W Cruise Night – 8-9pm
Every third Saturday each month, it's A&W Cruise Night featuring vintage cars. For information, call 625-1513.

Jan. 18 & Feb. 15 – Tulare Historical Museum Free Admission – 12:30-4pm
Admission is free to the Tulare Historical Museum, 444 W. Tulare Ave. For information, visit tularehistoricalmuseum.org.

Jan. 18 – PFLAG Meeting – 3-5pm
Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays Tulare & Kings County meets on the third Sunday each month at the Educational and Cultural Center, Congregation B'nai David, 1039 S. Chinowth, Visalia. For information, visit www.pflag-tulare-kings.org.

Jan. 21 – Spinal Cord Injury Support Group – 6:30-7:30pm
The Spinal Cord Injury Support Group meets on the third Wednesday of each month at Kaweah Delta Rehabilitation Hospital, 840 S. Akers St. For information, visit KaweahDelta.org.

Jan. 21 – Mystery Readers Book Club – 6:30-8pm
The book club will meets on the third Wednesday of each month at the Visalia Branch Library, 200 W. Oak St. For information, call 713-2709.

Jan. 21 – Central Valley Horror Club – 7pm
The Central Valley Horror Club meets on the third Wednesday of each month at The Planning Mill Artisan Pizzeria, 513 E. Center Ave., Visalia, to enjoy a free movie and $10 all-you-can-eat pizza. For information, visit facebook.com/centralvalleyhorrorclub.

Jan. 28 – COS Blood Drive – 10am-3pm
A blood drive will be held at the College of the Sequoias in Visalia. Donors will receive a free t-shirt.

Jan. 29 – Last Thursday Book Club – 6pm
The Tulare Public Library Last Thursday Book Club will meet.

Jan. 31 – Sci/Fi Book Club – 1pm
Tulare Public Library Sci/Fi Book Club meets on the last Saturday each month. For information, visit tularepubliclibrary.org.

THEATER

Jan. 9-25 – The 39 Steps – 7:30pm
Visalia Players Theater Company presents "The 39 Steps," a fast-paced whodunit spoof at the Ice House Theater, 410 E Race Ave., Visalia. Matinees will be held at 2pm Jan. 11, 18 & 25. Evening performances will be Jan. 9, 10, 16, 17, 23 & 24 at 7:30pm. For tickets and information, visit visaliaplayers.org.

Jan. 10 – Movie Night on the Farm – 5-7:30pm
McKellar Family Farms, will show Rise of the Guardians at 32985 Road 164 in Ivanhoe. For information, visit mckellarfamilyfarms.com.

Jan. 16, 17, 23, 24, 30 & 31 – Lilies in the Field – 7:30pm
The Barn Theater in Porterville presents "Lilies of the Field," the story of a group of Catholic nuns who escape from the communist-held portion of Berlin and come to the United States. Sunday matinees are scheduled for Jan. 18, 25 and Feb. 1. For information, visit barntheater.porterville.com.

Jan. 17 – Cirque Ziva - 7:30pm
Golden Dragon Acrobats will perform at the Visalia Fox Theatre. Adult tickets ($21-$29) and children's tickets ($15), are available at foxvisalia.org or by calling 625-1369.

Jan. 21-Jan. 24 – Guys & Dolls
El Diamante High School will perform the classic "Guys and Dolls" musical. For information, visit www.vusd.org/MtWhitney.cfm.

Jan. 27 – Independent Film Series – 6-7:45 pm
The Visalia Branch Library will host a film in the Blue Room. For information, call 713-2723.

Jan. 31 – Flip Schultz - 8-10pm
SNV Foundation will present comedian Flip Schultz along with performances by Allison Weber and Greg G. Williams at The Cellar Door, 101 W. Main St., Visalia. Tickets, $21, are available at snvfoundation.org.

Feb. 4 – The Second City 55th Anniversary Tour – 7:30pm
Art Beat, Inc. presents "A Lively Arts Series" at the Visalia Fox Theatre. The Second City sketch and comedy club produced such leading comedians as John Belushi, Bill Murray, John Candy, Mike Myers and more. A night of comedy, songs and improv are featured. Tickets, $22-$32, are available at FoxVisalia.org.

Feb. 5-7 – Mary Poppins, the Musical
Based on the beloved books by P.L. Travers and music from the Disney Movie starring Julie Andrews, "Mary Poppins" will be performed by Redwood High School. For information, visit www.vusd.org.

Feb. 6-21 – Winnie the Pooh
The Enchanted Playhouse presents "Winnie and Assorted Friends." The play will be held on Friday and Saturday at 7pm, and Sunday at 2pm at Main Street Theatre, 307 E. Main, Visalia. For information, visit enchantedplayhouse.org.

Feb. 13 – Broadway on Main Street – 8-10pm
Hands in the Community will host Betsy Wolfe starring in "Broadway on Main Street" at the Visalia Fox. Tickets, $25-$40 available at foxvisalia.org.

Feb. 18-21 – Grease
Mt. Whitney High School will perform the classic musical. For information, visit www.vusd.org

Sports

El Diamante Coach Jim Moore's Journey 'Round the World

Stefan Barros

El Diamante Head Boys Basketball Coach Jim Moore, who has held that title for five seasons, has been on a journey with the game of basketball that has taken him all over the globe. Moore played ten years of professional basketball in Europe and Asia.

Moore began playing basketball as a kid in his Southern California neighborhood and said that his coordination and rapid growth made things easier for him, "I had good hand/eye coordination and I grew quickly, so for a bigger guy I had good skills."

After playing his freshman and sophomore seasons at Redwood High School, Moore transferred to Lemoore High School. Along with playing basketball he also played football, but during his freshman year he suffered a major injury that ended his football season – and ruined his basketball season as well.

"I suffered a compound fracture to my leg during a game and I wasn't able to play basketball that season because of it," recalled Moore. "I stopped playing football after that."

Moore has a lot of memories of his high school basketball days, but the fondest of those memories is of his two seasons at Lemoore, "We won two Valley championships at Lemoore and I remember having a big game during the championship game my senior year against a really good team."

After his time at Lemoore High School, Moore moved on to the University of Nevada-Reno. It was there that he found his touch in scoring baskets, and where he built his body up, but also where he started becoming critical of his game.

"I was a high scorer on my team," he said. "Others thought I would be ready for the NBA, but I knew I wasn't ready for the NBA at that time. I was just building my body up in my first two or three years at Nevada."

Following college, Moore went on to enjoy a ten-year professional career, playing basketball in Europe and Asia. "I played in Paris, Germany, Budapest, Hungary, Portugal, Poland, Luxembourg and I was fortunate enough to end my career playing in Denmark." He said.

It was in Europe where Moore began to develop his game and his work ethic that would make him a successful professional basketball player, though he does admit there were challenges. "During my second season professionally, when I was playing in Hungary, I really struggled. The head coach wanted to know where I learned to play basketball because he didn't think I was very good."

Moore went on to discuss how he was able to develop his strong work ethic, "The practices were brutal. We practiced twice a day, and by the end of the day my legs were gone. Those practices really helped me become a hard diligent professional."

Moore mentioned that playing overseas was quite a change for him, and it opened his eyes to certain part of basketball he didn't pay attention to before, "There was a year when I was having the best season of my career and I was released in the middle of the season. That really opened my eyes to the business side of the game."

While in Europe, Moore began his coaching career. It was part of every player's contract there that while playing they had to coach youth teams. "There was definitely a language barrier, but we got through and I learned some really good communication skills while I was coaching over there."

Jim Moore, El Diamante's Head Boys Basketball Coach

After a nudge from his wife, Moore decided it was finally time to leave Europe and Asia and come back home to the States. There was also another reason why it was important for him to go home at that time, "We just bought a new home, and I thought it was about time to enjoy that home."

Moore landed the head coaching job at El Diamante High School. It is in coaching that he is able to instill in the high school kids what he learned overseas. "We have a lot of fun and bonding time, but that can wear off. Coaches have to be committed because nowadays kids have so much information at their hands. They have to know you know what you're doing."

Other than his commitment to his craft, Moore has a strong philosophy that he tries to convey to teams early on in every season, something he believes is the best environment for breeding success. "Players have to respect each other. They cannot call each other out, because that crosses a boundary. The players have to be able to pick each other up off the floor."

At El Diamante, Moore takes pride in being able to build a culture and a team with togetherness. His proudest moment as head coach came in his very first season at the helm for the Miners.

"We had no returning starters on our team, and our best player was ruled ineligible for the season," he said. "The kids we had on that team were coachable and we beat CVC, who at the time was best team in the Valley. It was a proud moment and shows that with the right mindset you can compete with anybody."

As far as the future is concerned, Moore is comfortable with staying at El Diamante and doesn't feel the need to coach anywhere else right now. "I've turned down assistant college jobs, and I would feel like I'm walking out on this kids if I did go somewhere else."

Fishing Derby

Continued from p. 17

the fish that they reel in. They are then encouraged to release the fish back into the pond. Prizes will be awarded to the top three finishers in each category. "The children should observe everything around them," said Donna Luallen, a member of Kaweah Fly Fishers, whose members also participate with the Department of Fish and Game for "Trout in the Classroom." "They should look out for ducks and geese, as the fish will avoid them.

"It doesn't matter what type of fishing pole or bait is used, as long as they get something into the water to see if the fish will take it," she advises entrants. "They should try to make it (the bait) something that fish will want to eat."

While catching fish is rewarding, the main purpose of the day is for fun and comradery. There will also be a raffle for entrants, including fishing poles and tackle boxes, so one does not have to catch a fish to win something.

Preregistration is being conducted at the Visalia Park and Recreation office at 345 N. Jacob St. Pre-entries are $5. Entries during the day of the event (space permitting) will be $7.

A girl gets some adult instruction on casting her line for the Visalia Trout Fishing Derby last January. More than 200 children are expected to participate in the 2015 Derby on Saturday, January 10. Photo courtesy of Visalia Parks and Recreation.

Disc Golf

Continued from p. 17

Club. That huge 18-hole course has the only par 5 hole in the Valley. This course is different from the Mooney Grove courses because of its rough terrain and the fact that it's not maintained, except by the cows that graze the land.

The newest Chuck Woody-designed disc golf course is being installed just east of the Slick Rock entrance at Kaweah Lake. This is also an 18-hole course in hilly-rough terrain with many challenging natural obstacles. Most of the pin locations have been installed.

"Construction was halted for a survey of the land and we are still awaiting the results so we can finish installing the course," said Woody. "The Army Corps of Engineers has already purchased all the baskets and has a grant for the rest of the materials to finish the course. When finished, this will be a beautiful disc golf course for all to enjoy and may soon host a PDGA event as well."

Visalia Disc Golf is now on the verge of bidding for the Amateur Disc Golf Tournament in 2016 or 2017. This event would bring 500-plus players for a seven-day, six-course amateur world championship.

"Raising money for an event like this with a goal of say, $50,000, is doable with continued sponsorship from Mike and Mark Perry of SJVC, Innova Disc Golf, the Disc Golf Association, Tulare County Parks & Rec, Tulare County Film Commission, Fistolera Construction and the Golden Karat Jewelry Store," said Woody. "The Perrys from SJVC have led the way in donating close to $100,000 since 2005 for opening new courses and supporting local PDGA tournaments. Without Mike and Mark Perry's support, disc golf would not be where it is today in Tulare County."

Woody also credited Neil Pilegard and the Tulare County Board of Supervisors for supporting the growth of disc golf in Tulare County.

"All we need now is more land to put the final two professional disc golf courses to have the six courses it will take to host the AM World DG Tournament," Woody added. "The great perk for disc golfers in hosting the AM World is that we get to keep the two courses for all to enjoy for many years."

For more information about disc golf, contact Chuck Woody at 625-4653.

Tulare Thunderbowl Raceway Releases 2015 Schedule of Events

Gary Thomas

Tulare Thunderbowl Raceway has officially released its 2015 schedule of events, highlighted by 11 nights of racing on eight different weekends this coming season.

As usual, the year begins with a two-night show featuring the World of Outlaws STP Sprint Car Series on March 13-14. This event will be co-sanctioned by the King of the West 410 Sprint Car Series, which guarantees an outstanding field of Winged 410 Sprint Cars during the weekend. Also competing both nights will be the entertaining USAC West Coast Wingless 360 Sprint Car Series.

The finale on March 14, will also see the new Western RaceSaver Sprints make their debut. In total, the RaceSaver Sprint Car Series will compete in Tulare seven times during the season. The much anticipated March weekend features the World of Outlaws/King of the West 410 Series, USAC West Coast Wingless 360's and Western RaceSaver Sprints.

The King of the West 410 Sprint Car Series will also be at the Thunderbowl on May 16 for the annual Chris & Brian Faria Memorial, on July 25 in the second running of the Peter Murphy Classic and on October 10, in the KRC Safety Fall Shootout. The October event takes place the weekend before Trophy Cup, giving teams one final chance to hit the track before the prestigious three-night show is held.

Along with the March weekend, the USAC West Coast Wingless 360 Sprint Car Series will return to the one-third mile clay oval on May 16, as part of the Chris & Brian Faria Memorial on May 30; July 25 in the Peter Murphy Classic, and on October 10 at the KRC Safety Fall Shootout. The USAC Honda Western Midget Series will also compete at the Thunderbowl this year on May 2 and May 30.

For the first time, Thunderbowl Raceway will host the traveling Civil War 360 Sprint Car Series presented by Flowmaster on April 25. The premier Winged 360 Sprint Car organization out west has competed at nearby Kings Speedway in the past, but this year will be a first at the blazing fast Tulare oval.

The season comes to an end with the prestigious 22nd annual Southwest Contractors Trophy Cup for Winged 360 Sprint Cars on October 15-17. Top drivers from California and beyond will be on hand in what has become arguably the "Grand Daddy" of California Sprint Car racing. This past season saw Sacramento's Willie Croft take home the $20,000 top prize while driving for Rudeen Racing. Last season, the Trophy Cup raised over $1,000,000 in donations to the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

The Thunderbowl is also being given a face lift this off-season, with new fencing going up in both corners to try and eliminate the delays that have been seen in the past following on-track incidents. For all your info on the Tulare Thunderbowl Raceway including a seating chart, log onto www.thunderbowlraceway.com or call 688-0909.

Tulare Thunderbowl Raceway 2015 Schedule

Friday, March 13: World of Outlaws STP Sprint Car Series/ King of the West 410 Sprint Car Series, USAC West Coast 360 Sprint Cars

Saturday, March 14: World of Outlaws STP Sprint Car Series/ King of the West 410 Sprint Car Series, USAC West Coast 360's, Western RaceSaver Sprints

Saturday, April 25: Civil War 360 Sprint Car Series presented by Flowmaster, Western RaceSaver Sprints, Vintage Cars

Saturday, May 2: USAC Western Midgets, Western RaceSaver Sprints, Vintage Cars

Saturday, May 16: Chris & Brian Faria Memorial- King of the West 410 Sprint Car Series, USAC West Coast 360 Sprint Cars, Western RaceSaver Sprints

Saturday, May 30: USAC West Coast 360 Sprints, USAC Western Midgets, Western RaceSaver Sprints, Vintage Cars

Saturday, July 25: 2nd annual Peter Murphy Classic- King of the West 410 Sprint Car Series, USAC West Coast 360 Sprints, Western RaceSaver Sprints

Saturday, October 10: KRC Safety Fall Shootout- King of the West 410 Sprint Car Series, USAC West Coast 360 Sprints, Western RaceSaver Sprints (Weekend before Trophy Cup)

Thursday, October 15: 22nd annual Southwest Contractors Trophy Cup Winged 360 Sprint Cars

Friday, October 16: 22nd annual Southwest Contractors Trophy Cup Winged 360 Sprint Cars

Saturday, October 17: 22nd annual Southwest Contractors Trophy Cup Winged 360 Sprint Cars

Health

Adult Cigarette Smoking Rate Overall Hits All-Time Low

Staff Reports

The cigarette smoking rate among adults in the U.S. dropped from 20.9% in 2005 to 17.8% in 2013, according to new data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in its *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

That is the lowest prevalence of adult smoking since the CDC's National Health Interview Survey began keeping such records in 1965. The report also shows the number of cigarette smokers dropped from 45.1 million in 2005 to 42.1 million in 2013, despite the increasing population in the U.S.

"There is encouraging news in this study, but we still have much more work to do to help people quit," said Tim McAfee, M.D., M.P.H., director of the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health. "We can bring down cigarette smoking rates much further, much faster, if strategies proven to work are put in place, like funding tobacco control programs at the CDC-recommended levels, increasing prices of tobacco products, implementing and enforcing comprehensive smoke-free laws, and sustaining hard-hitting media campaigns."

While smoking rates have dropped, there is a significant need to help those who continue to smoke. Cigarette smoking remains especially high among certain groups, most notably those below the poverty level, those who have less education, Americans of multiple race, American Indians/Alaska Natives, males, those who live in the South or Midwest, those who have a disability or limitation, and those who are lesbian/gay/bisexual. Data specific to sexual orientation were collected for the first time by the NHIS in 2013.

Among current cigarette smokers, the proportion of those who smoke every day decreased from 80.8% in 2005 to 76.9% in 2013. The proportion of cigarette smokers who smoke only on some days increased from 19.2% in 2005 to 23.1% in 2013. Among daily smokers, the average number of cigarettes smoked per day declined from 16.7 in 2005 to 14.2 in 2013. The proportion of daily smokers who smoked 20 to 29 cigarettes per day dropped from 34.9% in 2005 to 29.3% in 2013, while the proportion who smoked fewer than 10 cigarettes per day rose from 16.4% in 2005 to 23.3% in 2013.

"Though smokers are smoking fewer cigarettes, cutting back by a few cigarettes a day rather than quitting completely does not produce significant health benefits," said Brian King Ph.D., a senior scientific advisor with CDC's Office on Smoking and Health. "Smokers who quit before they're 40 years old can get back almost all of the 10 years of life expectancy smoking takes away."

Cigarette smoking is the leading preventable cause of disease and death in the United States, killing more than 480,000 Americans each year. For every person who dies this year, there are over 30 Americans who continue to live with a smoking-related disease. Smoking also takes a devastating toll on our nation's economy, costing more than $289 billion a year (including at least $133 billion in direct medical care for adults and more than $156 billion in lost productivity). In addition, use of other forms of smoking tobacco that are also very dangerous, such as cigars and hookahs, are not declining. In some populations, especially among young adults and adolescents, use of these products may even be increasing.

Surveys show that about 70% of all cigarette smokers want to quit, and research shows quitting completely at any age has health benefits. Smokers can get free help quitting by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW. There they can get free counseling and information about the seven smoking cessation medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. CDC's "Tips From Former Smokers" campaign features real people living with the consequences of smoking-related diseases and offers additional quit resources at www.cdc.gov/tips, including cessation assistance developed by the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health.

Most People Who Drink Excessively Are Not Alcohol Dependent

Staff Reports

Nine in 10 adults who drink too much alcohol are not alcoholics or alcohol dependent, according to a new study released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in collaboration with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The study appears the CDC journal Preventing Chronic Disease.

Excessive drinking includes binge drinking (four or more drinks on an occasion for women, five or more drinks on an occasion for men); consuming eight or more drinks a week for women or 15 or more drinks a week for men; or any alcohol use by pregnant women or those under the minimum legal drinking age of 21.

Alcohol dependence is a chronic medical condition that typically includes a current or past history of excessive drinking, a strong craving for alcohol, continued use despite repeated problems with drinking, and an inability to control alcohol consumption.

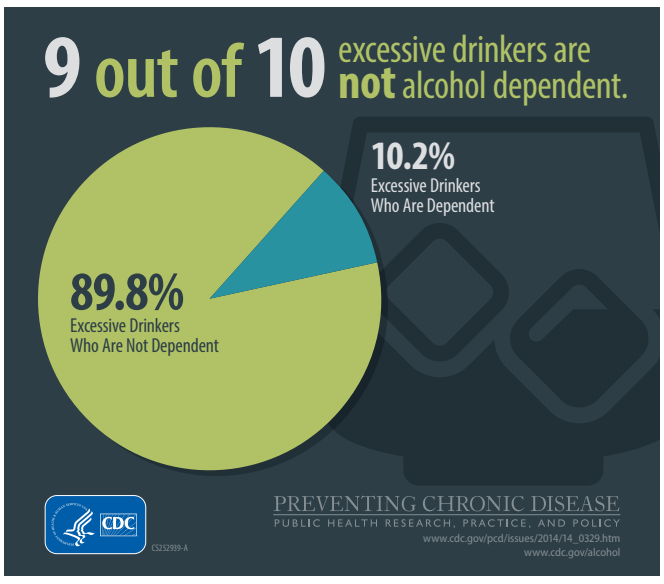
"This study shows that, contrary to popular opinion, most people who drink too much are not alcohol dependent or alcoholics," said Robert Brewer, M.D., M.S.P.H., Alcohol Program lead at CDC and one of the report's authors. "It also emphasizes the importance of taking a comprehensive approach to reducing excessive drinking that includes evidence-based community strategies, screening and counseling in healthcare settings, and high-quality substance abuse treatment for those who need it."

The study found that nearly one in three adults is an excessive drinker, and most of them binge drink, usually on multiple occasions. In contrast, about one in 30 adults is classified as alcohol dependent. The rates of alcohol dependence increase with the amount of alcohol consumed. About 10% of binge drinkers are alcohol dependent, while 30% of people who binge frequently (10 or more times a month) are alcohol dependent.

Excessive alcohol use is responsible for 88,000 deaths in the U.S. each year (including about 3,700 deaths from alcohol dependence), and cost the U.S. $223.5 billion in 2006. These deaths were due to health effects from drinking too much over time, such as breast cancer, liver disease and heart disease; and health effects from drinking too much in a short period of time, such as violence, alcohol poisoning and motor vehicle crashes.

Excessive drinkers who are dependent often need specialized or more intensive treatment to change their behavior. People who drink too much, but are not dependent, can still be encouraged to drink less through state and local interventions that increase the price and limit the availability of alcohol. In addition those who are not dependent may be candidates for other clinical interventions, including screening and counseling offered by doctors and other health professionals.

CDC and SAMHSA scientists analyzed data on 138,100 U.S. adults aged 18 years and older from all 50 states and D.C. who participated in the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) in 2009, 2010 or 2011. The survey includes a wide range of questions on substance use, including current drinking, binge drinking, average alcohol consumption and symptoms of alcohol dependence.



The Community Preventive Services Task Force recommends several evidence-based strategies to reduce excessive drinking, including increasing alcohol taxes, regulating alcohol outlet density, and holding alcohol retailers liable for harms resulting from illegal sales to minors or intoxicated patrons. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends screening and counseling for excessive drinking for all adult patients. This service is covered by most insurance plans, and can also be delivered by computer or telephone.

For more information about excessive drinking, including binge drinking, and how to prevent this dangerous behavior, visit the CDC's Alcohol and Public Health website at www.cdc.gov/alcohol/index.htm. Members of the public concerned about their own or someone else's drinking can call SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP to receive assistance from the Treatment Referral Routing Service.

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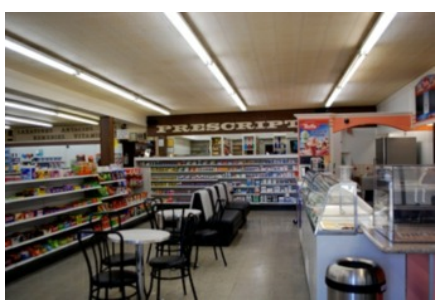

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Agriculture

Stand Up to Water Regulation

Diane Friend

When it comes to groundwater regulation, we can all agree on one thing - it is a pool of sharks edging for the power to regulate. Almost overnight, when the Governor signed the bills collectively called the "Sustainable Groundwater Management Act," the prevailing wind changed, and everyone representing a variety of agricultural interests, began to adjust their attitude from opposition to acceptance. I've heard a lot of comments such as, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em" to "We can't change what's already done." I say, "Whoa, wait a minute. Slow down cowboy!" There is still a lot of work to be done and it starts right here.

As I sat through a recent Groundwater Land Use Symposium sponsored by several engineering and law firms, and water agencies, I pondered the scope of the work we need to do here in Kings County. The event was billed as an informational symposium that encouraged questions from the audience. But it was clear because the schedule allowed for only a few comments that it was contained and controlled to discourage controversy or dissention among the attendees. Goodbye debate and welcome to cooperation.

"We need to work together to strengthen regulations so as not to encourage over-pumping," said Dr. Ellen Hanak from the Public Policy Institute of California. Hmmm... what did she really mean?

I attended the event, representing farmers, landowners and a constituency that derives their livelihood from production agriculture. This symposium was not for them. It was for the local agencies to learn about their 'new-coming-of-age' authority. As a matter of fact, as the opening speaker, Dr. Hanak was almost 'giddy' when she described the new legislation as "TOOLS" to help local agencies develop and implement sustainable groundwater management plans. Absent from her remarks were the "tools" that stakeholders need to equip themselves with to face the impacts of the impending law. Was the toolbox she described designed to protect private property and water rights? It was hard to square her apparent philosophy of "socially desired outcome" with the communities who would rather have water than a restore a fishery on the San Joaquin River.

All of this was, of course, shrouded in a veil of scare tactics that the state will step in if local agencies fail to act by the deadline dates. It reminded me of an old professor telling his class, "You'll be kicked out of school if you don't make the grades." Come to think of it, she may have been referring to the farmers, who most decidedly in her eyes need to stop irrigating to conserve groundwater.

If I sound cynical, I am. Catch phrases like 'sustainability' or 'socially desired outcome' has me wondering how many experts does it take to understand that, without irrigated agriculture, California's economy would collapse. My brother-in-law in Silicon Valley tells me otherwise. He, like millions of Northern Californians, does not see the problem with buying their fresh fruits and vegetables from foreign countries like Mexico or Chile.

We do need to work together to face this challenge, but we do not need to accept the narrative that puts agriculture at a clear disadvantage in the policy debate.

While it is true that groundwater is a vital component to California's water supply, and agriculture relies on it, so is the protection of surface water that is needed to produce crops in the Central Valley. Without surface water, sustainable communities here in the Central Valley will not exist.

Groundwater is interconnected with surface supplies in the Central Valley. They go together like peanut butter and jelly. To discuss sustainability without taking this into consideration is unrealistic and certainly not attainable. Standing up for groundwater stewardship and surface water contracts is the sure recipe for real management.

If reforming California's groundwater management is left up to the think tanks and experts, we might as well throw in the towel!

It will take those at ground zero to stand up and voice their concerns.

If you have any comments, call 584-3557.

Diane Friend is the outgoing executive director of the Kings County Farm Bureau.

USDA to Gauge Farmland Ownership and Farm Economics

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has begun surveying farmland owners to measure financial impacts and challenges of land ownership. Landowners should have received forms for the Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL) survey by the end of December.

"The latest Census of Agriculture helped us determine that more than 350 million acres of farmland in the United States are rented or leased, but it has been more than a decade since we spoke to individuals who own that land," said Jay Johnson, director of NASS' Census and Survey Division. "Today's economic conditions change so quickly that we constantly have the need for new and updated data, which reflect the true conditions in agriculture sector."

More than 80,000 farmland owners and producers across the United States were sent TOTAL forms. The TOTAL survey program will collect data from both farmers and landlords, who are not farm operators themselves, to create a complete picture of farm costs, land ownership, demographics about landowners, and improvements made to farmland and buildings, among other characteristics.

The statistical agency mailed out the survey forms to respondents in 48 contiguous states. In February, trained interviewers will also begin reaching out to the respondents who have not provided their input to answer any questions and help them fill out the survey forms.

The survey builds on information collected in the 2012 Census of Agriculture. As with all parts of the Census, responses to TOTAL are mandatory by law. The same law also ensures confidentiality of individuals' data. NASS safeguards the confidentiality of all responses, ensuring no individual respondent or operation can be identified.

"I know this is one of our lengthier surveys, but there is a tremendous amount of value in the information farmers and landowners provide," added Johnson. "I hope all individuals who receive the TOTAL survey form will take the time to respond."

NASS will publish results of the TOTAL survey in its Quick Stats database in August. Quick Stats is available online at quickstats.nass.usda.gov. NASS will also publish the economic data gathered in the annual Farm Production Expenditures report on August 4.

All NASS reports are available online at www.nass.usda.gov.

NASS is the federal statistical agency responsible for producing official data about U.S. agriculture and is committed to providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture.

Study: Almonds Generate More Than 100,000 California Jobs

Staff Reports

According to a new study from the University of California Agricultural Issues Center (AIC), the almond industry supports California's economic well-being by generating more than 100,000 jobs and more than $21 billion gross revenue across all industries in the state, adding about $11 billion dollars to size of the its total economy.

"As a major part of California agriculture, generating about 15% of the value of California farm output and almost 25% of agricultural exports, the California almond industry is a major contributor to a healthy and vibrant agriculture and a sound California economy needed to offer economic opportunity in the state," reads the report, which was led by AIC Director Dr. Daniel Sumner.

Throughout the state – and especially in California's Central Valley – the report's authors note, farms and processors not only provide direct employment but "also buy goods and services from other local firms that also provide jobs and generate incomes" for business owners and employees. That income, in turn, buys local consumer goods and services in addition to paying state and local taxes. These "economic ripples" create "indirect" and "induced" jobs and value.

The study examines and breaks out the economic impact – direct and indirect – of California almonds at every stage of production, from growing through hulling, shelling, handling, and manufacturing. Among its key findings, it concludes that:

- The almond industry as a whole, including processing and marketing, generates about 104,000 jobs statewide.
- Three quarters of those jobs are outside the almond industry – jobs that follow almonds off the farm and outside of the processing plant as a result of the business that almond industry members do with other companies and money they spend in their communities.
- Almond growing is responsible for about 21,000 direct farm jobs.
- In total – including indirect and induced effects – growing accounts for more than 68,000 jobs, handling for nearly 27,000 jobs, hulling and shelling for more than 5,000 jobs, and manufacturing for more than 3,000 jobs.
- The industry generates more than $21 billion in economic revenue and directly creates more than $11 billion of added value (the measure of California's Gross State Product).
- As almond production has expanded, California almond exports have become increasingly more valuable to the agriculture industry.

"Almonds have become a crop of choice in California because California is one of the only places in the world to effectively grow them," said Almond Board of California CEO Richard Waycott. "This report shows how that advantage is translating into value – not just for growers but for their communities and the state as a whole."

In addition to analyzing statewide impacts, the study finds that "the almond industry is especially important to jobs in the Central Valley of California," contributing about 97,000 jobs to the Valley alone. "These jobs are vital in a region that has long had high unemployment," it notes.

"Farming has been a critical source of value and economic activity for the state through good times and bad. In fact, even through the recession, the agricultural sector was a rare bright spot – and almonds have been a major part of that story," said Sumner.

The full report can be found online at http://aic.ucdavis.edu/almonds.

NEXT DEADLINE: 8 JANUARY 2015